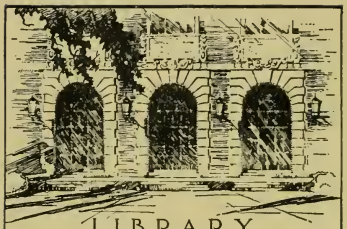

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MAY 13 2008

THE LAST OF THE MORTIMERS.

A STORY IN TWO VOICES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"MARGARET MAITLAND," "ADAM GRAEME,"

"THE HOUSE ON THE MOOR,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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v. 2

PART III.

(Continued)

THE LADIES AT THE HALL

THE LAST OF THE MORTIMERS.

PART III.—*(continued).*

CHAPTER IV.

This conversation, of course, set my thoughts all into a ferment again. Little Sara was wonderfully quick-witted, if she was not very wise, as, indeed, was not to be expected at her years; and I confess her idea did return to my mind a great many times. Sarah might have known an Italian Countess in that obscure time of her life which I had no clue to; might even know some reason why persons from Italy might be looking for her, and might be nervous, for old acquaintance' sake, of any one finding her out. When everything was so

blank, any sort of sign-post was satisfactory. It was true that I don't remember seeing Sarah display so much anxiety for any other person all her life before. But there might be reasons; and if it was a friendly feeling, *I* should certainly be the last person in the world to worry and aggravate my sister. I wish I could have composed my mind with all the reasonings I went through; but really, when I saw poor Sarah sitting all watchful and conscious at her knitting, not getting on at all with her work, hearing the least rustle in the room, or touch at the door; starting, and trying to conceal her start every time the bell rung, with all the features of her face growing thinner, and her hands and head trembling more than they ever used to do, it was quite impossible for me to persuade myself that her mind was not busy with something which had happened, or which was about to happen. It might be something as completely unconnected with

the poor Italian as possible; most likely it was; but *something* there was which agitated her most unaccountably, which I knew nothing about, and which she was determined I should not know. She was as conscious that I observed this strange change upon her as I was myself; and she faced me with such a resolution and defiance! No! I could read it in her eyes, and the full look she turned upon me whenever I looked at her — she would die rather than I should find it out.

It is quite impossible, however ignorant you may be of the causes of it, to live in the close presence of a person devoured by anxiety without being infected by it, more or less. One gets curious and excited, you know, in spite of one's self; and all the more, of course, if the cause is quite inexplicable and the trouble sudden. I lived in the kind of feeling that you have just immediately before a thunderstorm — the air all of a hush, so that you could

hear the faintest stir of a bird, or rustle of a branch, yet never knowing the moment when, instead of the bird's motion or the leaves' tremble, it might be the thunder itself that clamoured in your ears.

In this condition of mind Sara's little side reference to Carson, and my sister's acquaintance with everything that passed, did not fail to have its effect upon me, as well as other things. I don't know that I would have been above questioning Carson if I could have got at her; but I did not see her once in three months, and could not have had any conversation with her without making quite an affair of it, and letting all the house know. Carson was not her right name. She had been Sarah's maid when she was a young girl, and had married and lost her husband, and come back to the Park just in time to go abroad with her mistress, and being well known in the house by her maiden name, never got any other. I could not help wondering

within myself if she knew, or how much she knew, of Sarah's trouble, and its cause, whatever that might be. When the thought rose in my mind whether I might not try to get to private speech of Carson, I was out in the grounds making a little survey, to see how everything was looking for spring, and had just been at the lodge to see poor little Mary, who (as I had foreseen from the beginning) was bad with the whooping-cough, but no worse than was to be expected, and nothing alarming or out of the way. The carriage had just gone up to take Sarah out for her drive, and I, all in shelter of a clump of holly bushes, became the witness, quite unawares and without any intention, of a most singular scene. A footstep went softly by me upon the gravel. I was just behind the lodge, and within sight of the gate and the road without. I saw Carson, in her cap and indoors dress, go softly out at the gate. She went out into the road, pretending to hold

out her hand and raise her face to see whether it rained; as if it were not perfectly clear to any one that it did not rain, nor would, either, till the glass fell. She looked up and down with an anxious look, and lingered five minutes or more in that same position. Then she came in, and met the carriage just inside the gate, which Williams had come to her cottage door to open. "All's quite bright and clear, Ma'am," I heard Carson say; "no appearance of rain. I hope you'll have a pleasant drive." A moment after the carriage wheeled quickly out, the blind being drawn down just as it turned into the road. Carson stood looking after it with a kind of grieved, compassionate expression, which made me like her better. She answered Williams' question, "Whatever had come over Miss Sarah to make her so particklar about the weather; in the carriage, too, as she wouldn't be none the wiser, wet nor dry!" very shortly, sighed, and turned to go back, mincing with true

lady's-maid nicety, along the road. The sigh and the pitying look on her face determined me. I took a quick step through the bushes and came up to her. The holly branches tore a bit of trimming, as long as my finger, off my garden hood (I think a hood a great deal more suitable than a hat for a person of my years); but I did not mind. Here was a chance if I could only use it well.

"Carson," said I, not to give her time to think, "my sister has surely grown very fidgety of late?"

Carson stared at me in an alarmed, confused way; but soon got back her self-possession. "My missis was always a bit fidgety, ma'am, though no more than she had a right to be," said this one real, true, faithful adherent, whom Sarah had secured to her cause.

"I don't know about such rights," said I. "Now tell me, Carson; — you know a great deal more about her than I do. Don't you

think I can see how nervous and disturbed she is?—what's the matter with my sister? what is she afraid of? and what do you and she expect to see upon the road, that you go out to look that the way is clear, before she ventures beyond the gate? Don't tell me about rain, I know better; what did you expect to see?"

Carson was taken entirely by surprise; she faltered, she grew red, she wrung her hands; she stammered forth something quite unintelligible, consisting of exclamations. — "Ma'am! Miss Milly!" and "My missis!" all confused and run into each other. She had no time to invent anything; and her fright and nervousness for the moment quite betrayed her.

"I don't want you to be false to your mistress," said I, getting excited, in my turn, at finding myself so near a clue to this mystery, as I thought. "I don't want you to tell me her secret, if she has one — only let me know. Is there some danger

apprehended? Is there some one in the country that Sarah is afraid to see? What is wrong? Her limbs are trembling under her, and her face growing thinner. Only think of her going out with the blinds down, poor forlorn soul! What is wrong? It would mend matters, somehow, if I knew."

"Miss Milly," said Carson, with a great many little coughs and clearings of her throat, "my missis has an attack on her nerves, that's what it is; when she haves them attacks, she grows fidgety, as you say, ma'am. A little nice strengthening medicine, now, or a change of air, would be a nice thing. I said that to my missis just this very morning. I said 'A few months at Brighton, now, or such like, would do you a world of good, ma'am.' It's on her nerves, that's what it is."

Carson had got quite glib and fluent before she ended this speech; the difficulty had only been how to begin.

"Now, Carson!" cried I, "if your

mistress's health suffers, and it turns out to be something you could have told me, you may be certain I shall call you to account for it. Think what you are saying. We Mortimers never have nervous attacks. I know you're deceiving me. Think again. *Will* you tell me what is wrong?"

"Ma'am, Miss Milly, it's an attack on the nerves," cried Carson; "my missis has had them before. I couldn't say more if I was to talk till to-morrow. I've got my caps to see to, I ask your pardon;—my missis is very particular about her caps."

Upon which Carson somehow managed to elude me, with a mixture of firmness and cunning quite extraordinary; and while I had still my eyes fixed on her, and was calling her to stay with all the authority of my position as acting mistress of the house, contrived to melt in at a back door and escape out of my hands, I never could explain how. Talk about controlling people with your eye, and swaying them by

force of character, and all that! I defy anybody to sway a servant in a great house who is trained to the sort of thing, and knows how to recollect her work at a critical moment, and the nearest way to the back stairs. Carson had proved herself too many for me.

CHAPTER V.

It seems I was destined to hear of nothing but this Italian! I had not kept faith to him, certainly. I had been startled and thrown back by finding out how the idea of him got to be involved in Sarah's trouble; and really I did not care much about the Countess Sermoneta, whom I had never heard of. I had been interested in *him*, I allow; but how could I keep up an interest in strangers, with so much closer an anxiety near home?

However, just the next day after I had spoken to Carson, Dr. Roberts called. Dr. Roberts was our rector; not a relation, but a kind of family connection, somehow, I

really could not tell how. For three or four generations, at least, a Roberts had held our family living. There were so few of us Mortimers, as I have already explained, that the living could never be of any personal use to us; and our great-great-grandfathers had happened to be intimate, and so it came about that the living was as much an hereditary thing to the Robertses as our property was to us. Dr. Roberts was the best of good, easy, quiet men. He preached us a nice little sermon every Sunday. He would dine with the people who were in a condition to ask him, and make himself as agreeable as possible. He patted the children on the head, and wondered how it was that he had forgotten their names. Of course he had his own way of doing most things, and seldom varied; but then one could always calculate on what he would do and say, and wasn't that a comfort? On the whole, he was the most excellent, good drowse of a man I ever knew. He led a very quiet life,

with little interruption, except when, now and then, a storm seized upon him, in the shape of a new curate with advanced ideas. In such cases Dr. Roberts generally bowed to the tempest till its force was exhausted. He laughed in his quiet way at the young men. "They are all for making a fuss when they begin," he said to me, confidentially; "but depend upon it, when they come to our age, Miss Milly, they'll find the advantage of just getting along." That was his favourite mode of progress. He was too stout and easy to make much haste. He loved to get along quietly; and really, as ours was a small parish, and nothing particular to make a commotion about, I don't suppose there was much harm done.

But only to think of Dr. Roberts becoming one of my assailants! I never could have expected any such thing. He came in, bringing some books from Miss Kate, who was as unlike him as possible. She was very active in the parish, and had

something to do, with or for, everybody. She was rather Low-Church, and sent us books to read, to do us good, which, for my part, I always read faithfully, being very willing to have good done me, as far as it was practicable. Dr. Roberts sat down with a little sigh in the round easy-chair, his particular chair, which Ellis wheeled out for him; not with a sentimental sigh, good man; but the road to the Park ascends a little, and the doctor, for the same reason as Hamlet, was a little scant of breath.

We were all as usual. Sarah, in the shadow of the screen, with her knitting-pins in her hands, and her basket of wools and patterns at her side; myself opposite, commanding a view of the door and the great mirror, and all the room; little Sara, half a mile off, reading at one of the windows—for it was very mild for February, and really one did not feel much need of a fire. Dr. Roberts wandered on in his comfortable way for half an hour at least; he

complimented Miss Mortimer on always being so industrious, and me upon my blooming looks! only think of that! but I dare say he must have forgotten that it was Sarah who was the beauty; and he gave us a quiet opinion upon the books he had brought us, that they were "very much in Kate's style, you know;" and had a word to say about the curate—just one of his comfortable calls, when he has something to say about everybody; nothing more.

"But, by the by," said the good Doctor, "I had almost forgotten the principal thing. There's something romantic going on among us just now, Miss Milly. Where is little Miss Cresswell? she ought to hear this."

"What is it, Doctor?" I asked, rather startled by this beginning.

"Well, the fact is, I have had a strange sort of visitor," said the Doctor, with a soft little laugh; "or rather two, I should say," he continued, after a little pause, "ha! ha! I had Hubert to him, who pretends to speak

Italian, you know, ha! ha! He could speak Dante, perhaps; but he can't manage the Transteverine. I can't say that I did not enjoy it a little. These young fellows, Miss Milly, are so happy in their own good opinion. Poor Hubert was terribly put out."

"Who are you speaking of?" asked I again.

"Well, of a visitor I had; or two, as I have just said,—the master and the man. The master speaks English very tolerably; the man is the real, native, original article, newly imported. I am in good condition myself," said the good Doctor, giving a quiet unconscious pinch to his plump wrist; "but anything like that, you know, goes quite beyond me. You would have laughed to see poor young Hubert, poor fellow, talking to him in his high Dantesque way, and the fat fellow dashing in through the midst of it all, helter skelter, in *real* Italian. Ha! ha! it was a most amusing scene."

"Italian?" said I, scarcely venturing to speak above my breath, my consternation was so great.

"Yes," said Dr. Roberts, calmly, with still a little agitation of laughter about his voice —the discomfiture of the curate amused him excessively — "Italian. The young man called on me to ask after a lady, whom he supposed to be living in this neighbourhood, a Countess Sermoneta. Did you ever hear of such a person, Miss Milly?"

"No," said I, as quietly as I could. Sarah took no notice, showed no curiosity, betrayed to me that she *had* heard this name before, and did not learn the particulars of the stranger's inquiry for the first time. In general she liked to hear the news; and though she rarely took any part in the conversation, listened to it, and showed that she did so. To-day she never raised her head. Perhaps I was over-suspicious; but this entire want of interest only added to my bewildering doubts.

At this point little Sara came forward, and thrust herself, as was natural, into a conversation so interesting to her; I only wondered she had not done it sooner.

"That is poor Mr. Luigi, that has been so much talked of in Chester," cried Sara; "and godmamma met him on the road, and promised to try and find out for him. Do make her take it up, please, Dr. Roberts. Did *you* never hear of the lady either? How strange nobody should have heard of her! Who was she, does he say? What does he want with her? do tell us, dear Dr. Roberts, please."

Sarah's knitting-pins had dropped out of her hand when her goddaughter broke in upon Dr. Roberts' good-humoured drowsy talk. I turned to help her to pick them up, but she waved me away. What *could* be the matter? she was trembling all over like an aspen leaf.

"My dear Miss Cresswell, he gave me no information whatever," said the Doctor,

smiling most graciously upon the pretty dainty little creature in her velvet jacket; "and, indeed, he was not quite the kind of man that I should undertake to question. Hubert might do it, you know, ha! ha! but then he rather stands on the dignity of his office, and would not mind putting you, yourself, dangerous though it might be, through your catechism. I did all that lively curiosity could do, you may believe, to find out who *he* is, and who *she* was, but I made nothing of it. He, as you seem to know, calls himself Mr. Luigi, and he wants the Countess Sermoneta, a person no one in Cheshire ever heard of. I told him I had no doubt he was mistaken in the locality; near Manchester, perhaps, or Chichester, or some other place with a similar-sounding name; but I don't think he took in what I said. And you saw him, too, Miss Milly? very odd, wasn't it? He must have made a mistake in the place."

"I suppose so," said I, quite faintly.

Sarah's knitting-pins had actually fallen out of her hands again!

"I promised to inquire and let him know if I heard anything," said the rector; "but if I do not know, and you do not know, Miss Milly, — we're about the likeliest people in the county, I suspect, — I don't think it is much good making other inquiries. You are sure you never heard the name?"

"Never in my life, so far as I recollect," said I. "I promised to make inquiries, too, and asked him to come to the Park, and I would let him know. But that seems merely tantalising him. If you will give me the address, Dr. Roberts, I will write him a note."

He gave me the address in his own leisurely way, and then he returned to the scene at the rectory, where he had called the curate, who happened to be with him at the time, to talk to Mr. Luigi's servant, not without some intention of doing the good

young man a mischief, I am sure; and how poor Mr. Hubert talked Dantesque, as the Doctor said, shaking his portly person with quiet laughter, and the fat Italian burst in with a flood of what Dr. Roberts called *real* Italian. I could understand how it would be from what I had seen myself; but I confess I found it very difficult to listen and smile as it was necessary to do. There sat Sarah, close up in the shelter of her screen, never lifting her head or making any sign to show that she heard the conversation; not a smile rose upon her face; *she* saw nothing amusing in it; her lips were firm set together, and all the lines of her face drawn tight; and though her cheeks retained a kind of unnatural glow, which, for the first time in my life, made me think that Sarah certainly used paint, or something to heighten her complexion, her brow and chin, and all except that pink spot, were ghastly, grey, and colourless. She had stopped her knitting altogether now,

and was rubbing her poor fingers, making believe to be very much occupied with them, stooping down to rub the joints before the fire. It quite went to my heart to see her sitting so forlorn there, shut up within herself. Ah! whatever it was she feared, could I ever be hard upon her? could I ever do anything but help her to bear what misfortune or anxiety she might be under? I thought Dr. Roberts would never be done with his story. I thought he would never go away. I dare say he, on his part, thought we had just had a quarrel, or something of that sort, and gave Miss Kate an amusing description of us when he went home; for he had an amusing way of telling a story. And then, how to get quit of little Sara when he was gone? I felt sure my sister would break out upon me somehow, most likely without taking any notice of the real reason; but all that silent excitement must find an outlet somehow; either that, or her mind would give way, or

she would break a blood-vessel, or something dreadful would happen. I knew Sarah's ways very well, we had been so long together. I knew that, one way or other, she must get it out, and relieve herself; and, to be sure, there was nobody whom she *could* relieve her feelings upon but me.

CHAPTER VI.

All in haste, and in a peremptory tone, to which nobody could be less used to than she was, I had sent little Sara away on some commission, invented on the spur of the moment, when the door closed on Dr. Roberts. The child looked up in my face with an amazed uncomprehension of any order issued to her; I fancy I can see her great eyes growing larger and blacker as she turned, asking what I meant. But Sara had understanding in her, wilful as she was; she saw there was occasion for it, though she could not understand how; and whenever her first surprise was over, she went off and obeyed me with an alacrity

which I shall always remember. We two were left alone. I took up some work that lay on the table. I could not tell whether it was mine or Sara's, or who it belonged to. I bent my head fumbling over it, too agitated to see what I was doing. Now the volcano was about to explode. Now, even, an explanation might be possible.

"What was that I heard from you just now?" cried Sarah, in her shrill whisper. "You were so lost to all common feeling, you were so forgetful of my claims and everybody else's, that you invited a common foreign impostor to come here—here, without an idea what bad intentions he might have—here to my house!"

"Sarah! for heaven's sake what do you know about him? What have you to do with this young man?" said I, the words bursting, in spite of myself, from my lips.

I suppose she did not expect this question. She stopped with a flood of other reproaches and accusations ready to be

poured forth, staring at me — staring — there is no other word for it. Her looks were dreadful to me. She looked like some baited animal that had turned to bay. Was it my doing? Presently her senses came back to her. And I was glad, really thankful, when I saw that it was mere passion — one of her fits of temper, poor dear soul! that had returned upon her again.

"You dare to ask me such questions?" she cried; "you, a poor simpleton that throws our doors open to any adventurer! This is what I have to do with him. He shall never enter my house. I'll have him expelled if he comes here. I'll muster the servants and let them know who's mistress,—you, a rustical fool that knows nothing of the world, and are ready to throw yourself at anybody's head that flatters you a little, or me, that know life and can detect a cheat? What! you'll go and slander me in addition, will you? You worry and drive me out of my senses, and then

pretend that I have something to do with every impostor you pick up in the streets. I tell you I'll have him turned out if he dares to come to this house. I will not have my peace molested for your fool's tricks and intrigues. An Italian forsooth! a fellow that will cringe to you, and flatter you, and be as smooth as velvet. I'll have him thrown into prison if he dares to come here!"

"Sarah! Sarah! for what reason? the poor young man has never harmed you," I cried, holding up my hands.

She gave a strange bitter cry. "Fool! how can you tell whether he has harmed me?" she cried out, wringing her thin hands: then suddenly stopping short, came to herself again, and stared at me once more. Always that stare of blank resistance—the hunted creature brought to bay. She had been standing while she spoke before. Now she dropped into her chair, exhausted, breathless, with a strange look of fury at herself. She thought she had be-

trayed herself — and most likely so she had, if I had possessed the slightest clue by which to find her mystery out.

"I beg and entreat you to be calm, and not to excite yourself," cried I, trying, if it were possible, to soothe her. "I know nothing whatever about this young Italian, Sarah. I took an interest in him from his appearance, and something in his voice — and because he was a stranger and had no friends. But I will write to him immediately not to come — he is nothing to me. He has neither flattered me nor asked anything of me. I see no harm in him; but I shall certainly write and say he is not to come. You might know well that there is no stranger in the world for whom I would cross you."

"Oh, I am used to fair speeches, Milly," said my sister, "quite used to them; and used to being made no account of when all's done. I, that might have been so different. I might have had a coronet, and

been one of the leaders of life, instead of vegetating here; and, instead of respecting me after I have resigned all that, I am to be badgered to death by your old maid's folly, and have a vulgar impostor brought in upon me to oust me out of my home. Bring in whom you like, thank heaven, I'm more than a match for you. I tell you, you shall bring nobody here — it is my house, and was my house before you were born. I shall keep it mine, and leave it to whom I like. Your romances and fictions are nothing in this world to me. I am mistress, and I will be mistress. You are only my younger sister, and I have nothing in the world to consult but my own pleasure. I am not to be driven into changing my mind by any persecution. I advise you to give up your schemes before you suffer for them. Nobody, I tell you, — no man in the world with evil designs against me, and my fortune, and my honour, shall come into my house!"

"Sarah! what on earth do you mean? Who is plotting against you? Your fortune and your honour! What are you thinking of? You have gone too far to draw back now," cried I, in the greatest excitement. "Explain yourself before we go any farther — what do you mean?"

Once more she stared at me blankly and fiercely; but she had got it out, and had more command of herself after she had relieved her mind. Could it be only an outburst of passion? but my spirit was up.

"The house is my house as well as yours," I cried, when she did not answer. "I have a voice as powerful as yours in everything that has to be done. Yes, I can see what is going to happen. We are the two Mortimers that are to send it out of the name. But I will not give up my rights, either for the prophecy or for any threats. I have never made a scheme against you, nor ever will. You have been wretched about something ever since that

day you were so late on your drive. I have seen it, though I cannot tell the reason. This Italian cannot be any connection of yours. He is a young man; he could not be more than born when you were abroad. You might be his mother for age. What fancy is it that you have taken into your mind about him? What do you suppose you can have to do with him? Sarah, for heaven's sake! what is the matter? If you ever had the slightest love for me, take me into your confidence, and let me stand by you now."

For when I was speaking, some of my words, I cannot tell which, had touched some secret spring that I knew nothing of; and dropping down her head upon her hands she gave such a bitter, desperate groan that it went to my very heart. I ran to her and fell on my knees by her side. I kissed her hand, and begged her to have confidence in me. I was ready to promise never to disturb her, never to speak of setting up a will of my own again; but I

felt I must not give in; it would be now or never. She would trust me and tell me her trouble, whether it was real or only fanciful; and her mind would be relieved when it was told.

But the now passed and the never came. She lifted up her head and pushed me away; she looked at me with cold stony eyes; she relapsed without a moment's interval into her usual chilly, common-place, fretful, tone—that tone of a discontented mind and closed heart which had disturbed and irritated mine for years. All her old self returned to her in an instant. Even her passion had been elevating and great in comparison. She looked at me with her cold observant eyes, and bade me get up, and not look so like a fool. "But it is impossible to think of teaching you what anybody else of your age and position must have learned thirty years ago," she said, twitching her dress, which, when I foolishly threw myself down beside her, I had put

my knee upon unawares, from under me. I cannot describe to anybody the mortified, indignant feeling with which I scrambled up. Think of going down upon my knees to her, ready to do anything or give up anything in the world for her, and meeting this reception for my pains! I felt almost more bitterly humiliated and ashamed than if I had been doing something wrong. I, who was not a young girl but an elderly woman, long accustomed to be respected and obeyed! If she had studied how to wound me most deeply, she could not have succeeded better. I got up stumbling over my own dress, and hastily went out of the room. I even went out of the house, to calm myself down before I met anybody. I would not like to confess to all the angry thoughts that came into my mind for the next hour in the garden. I walked about thinking to get rid of them, but they only grew more and more vivid. My affection was rejected and myself insulted at the same

moment. You would not suppose, perhaps, that one old woman could do as much for another; but I assure you, Sarah had wounded me as deeply as if we had been a couple of young men.

When I found my temper was not going down as it ought to do, but on the contrary my imagination was busy concocting all sorts of revengeful things to say to her, I changed my plan, and went back to the library and looked over the newspapers. Don't go and think over it, dear good people, when you feel very much insulted and angry. Read the papers or a novel. I went down naturally when I stopped thinking. After all, poor Sarah! poor Sarah! whom did she harm by it? only herself, not me!

But anybody will perceive at a glance that after this I was more completely bewildered than ever, and could not undertake to say to my own mind, far less to anybody else, whether there was or was not

any real reason for Sarah's nervousness, or whether she had actually any sort of connection with this young Italian. Sometimes I made myself miserable with the idea that the whole matter looked like an insane fancy. People when they are going mad, as I have heard, always take up the idea that they are persecuted or wronged somehow. What if Sarah's mind were tottering, and happening to catch sight of this young man, quite a stranger, and very likely to catch her eye, her fancy took hold of him as the person that was scheming against her? The more I thought over this, the more feasible it looked; though it was a dreadful thing to think that one's only sister was failing in her reason, and that any night the companion of my life might be a maniac. But what was I to think? How was it possible, no madness being in the case, that a young unknown stranger could threaten the fortune and honour of Sarah Mortimer, born heiress of

the Park, and in lawful possession of it for more than a dozen years? What possible reason could there be for her, if she was in her sane senses, fearing the intrigues of anybody, much less a harmless young foreigner? But then that groan! was it a disturbed mind that drew that involuntary utterance out of her? Heaven help us! What could any one think or do in such circumstances? I was no more able to write a note to Mr. Luigi that evening than I was to have gone out and sought him. Things must just take their chance. If he came he must come. I could not help myself. Besides, I had no thought for Mr. Luigi and his lost Countess. I could think only of my sister. No! no! little Sara was deceived, clever as she was. Sarah knew no Countess Sermoneta — her mind, disturbed and unsettled, had fixed upon the strange face on the way, only as some fanciful instrument of evil to herself.

CHAPTER VII.

Next morning at breakfast I found a letter waiting me, in an unknown hand — an odd hand, not inelegant, but which somehow gave a kind of foreign look even to the honest English superscription. The address was odd, too. It was Miss *Milla* Mortimer, a very extraordinary sort of title for me, Millicent. That is the work of diminutives — they are apt to get misunderstood and metamorphosed into caricatures of names.

The letter inside was of a sufficiently odd description to correspond with the address; this is how it was expressed:—

"Madame,

"You will pardon me if I say Madame, when I perhaps should ought to say Mademoiselle. Madame will understand that the titles of honour, which differ in every country, do much of times puzzle a foreigner. Since I had the honour of making an encounter with Mademoiselle, I have more than once repeated my searches; and all in finding no one, it has come to me in the head to go to another place, where there may be better of prospects. I have, then, made the conclusion to go to Manchester, where I shall find, as they say, some countrymen, and will consult with their experience. There are much of places, they say, with Chester in the name. I go to make a little voyage among them. If I have the happiness to find the Contessa, I will take the liberty of making Madame aware of it. If it is to fail, I must submit. I shall return to Chester; and all in making my homage to Madame, will use

the boldness of asking if anything of news respecting the Contessa may have come to her recollection. In all cases Madame will permit me to remember with gratitude her bounty to a stranger.

"LUIGI S——."

Sara and I were, as usual, alone at the breakfast-table, and, to tell the truth, I prized this interval when Sarah's eyes were not upon me, nor all the troublous matters conveyed in her looks present to my mind, as quite a holiday season,—when I could look as I liked, say what I pleased, and be afraid of nobody. Besides, though I was more and more uneasy about Sarah, I was not disturbed in my mind about this young man to the degree I had been, nor so entirely mystified about any possible connection between them. Since last evening, thinking it all over, it came to be deeply impressed upon my mind that there was no connection between them: that my

poor sister knew nothing whatever about him or his Italian Countess. Simply that Sarah's mind, poor dear soul, was giving way, and that catching sight of the strange face on the road, she had somehow identified and fixed upon it as the face of an unknown agent of trouble, the "somebody" who always injures, or persecutes, or haunts the tottering mind. It was but little comfort to me to conclude upon this, as you may suppose, but it seemed to explain everything. It cleared up a quite unintelligible mystery. Poor Sarah! poor soul! She who had known such a splendid morning, such an exciting noon, such a dull, leaden afternoon of life,—and how dark the clouds were gathering round her towards the night!

But being thus eased in my mind about the young man, the kindness I had instinctively felt to him came strong upon me. I remembered the look he had, quite affectionately, the nice, handsome, smiling

young fellow! Who could it be that he was like? Somebody whom I remembered dimly through the old ages; and his voice, too? His voice made a thrill of strange wondering recollections run through me. Certainly that voice had once possessed some power or influence over my mind. I decided that he would not find his Countess in Manchester. Fancy the ridiculous notion! A Countess in Manchester! No. She must belong about Cheshire, somewhere; and I must have known her in my youth.

So I read his note twice over, with a good deal of interest, and then naturally, as we had talked of him together so often, handed it to Sara. Now I did not in the least mean to watch Sara while she read it, but, having my eyes unconsciously upon her face at the moment, was startled, I acknowledge, by seeing her suddenly flush up, and cast a startled glance at me, as if the child expected that something more than

usual was to be in the note. Who could tell what romantic fancies might be in her head? It is quite possible her imagination had been attracted by the stranger, and perhaps if she had heard that Mr. Luigi had fallen romantically in love with her, Sara would have been less surprised and much less shocked than I should. However, there was no such matter, but only a sensible, though, I must confess, rather odd and Frenchified note. After the first glance she read it over very calmly and carefully, then laid it down, with something that looked wonderfully like a little shade of pique, and cried out in her sharpest tone —

"Oh, godmamma, how sensible!—to be sure to be an Italian, and young, he must be a perfect miracle of a Luigi. Actually, because there are countrymen of his in Manchester — music teachers and Italian masters, of course — to give up an appointment with a lady, and at such a house as

the Park! I think he must be quite the most sensible and pretty-behaved of young men."

"I think he shows a great deal of sense," said I, not altogether pleased with the child's tone; "but if you will excuse me saying so, Sara, I think it is just a little vulgar of you to say 'at such a house as the Park.'"

Sara flushed up redder and redder. I quite thought we were to have a quarrel again.

"Oh, of course, godmamma, if I had been speaking of a — of an English gentleman; but you know," said the wicked little creature, looking boldly in my face, "you set him down at once, whenever you heard of him, as an adventurer,— a count, you know,— one of the fellows that came sneaking into people's houses and wanted to marry people's daughters. I am only repeating what you said, godmamma. It was not I that said it. And now you perceive this good

respectable young man does not attempt anything of the kind."

"But then you see we, at the Park, have no daughters to marry," said I, looking at her rather grimly.

"Oh, to be sure, that makes all the difference," cried Sara, bursting open her own letters with a half-ashamed, annoyed laugh. I have no doubt she had said twice as much as she meant to say, the impatient little puss, and was ashamed of herself. She had set her heart on seeing Mr. Luigi, that was the plain truth of the matter. Seeing him at the Park, where of course papa could have nothing to say against the introduction, hearing all about his search after the unknown lady, exercising her wiles upon him, turning him into a useless creature like that poor boy Wilde, in Chester, who was good for nothing but to waylay her walks and go errands for her. That was what she wanted, the wicked little coquette. It was just as well Mr. Luigi had

taken care of himself, and kept out of the way. I really thought it was right to read her a lecture on the occasion.

"Sara, you are quite disappointed the poor young man is not coming. You wanted to make a prey of him, you artful puss," said I. "You thought, out here in the country, with nothing else to do, it would be good fun to make him fall in love with you—you know you did! And I think it is not at all a creditable thing, I assure you. How can you excuse yourself for all the damage you have done to that poor young Wilde?"

"Damage!" cried Sara. "If I am a puss, I may surely pounce upon a mouse that comes in my way," she said spitefully; and then putting on her most innocent look; —"but, indeed, it is very shocking to have such suspicions of me, especially as I am a fright now, godmamma Sarah says."

"It is just as well Mr. Luigi does not put himself in your way," said I; "and it would

be very wicked of you to do any harm to him, or attempt such a thing; and I say so particularly, because I think you are quite inclined to it, Sara, which is very wrong and very surprising. You are not such a beauty as your godmamma Sarah was, but you have just the same inclinations. It is something quite extraordinary to me."

The little puss looked at me with her wicked eyes blazing, and her face flushed and angry. She looked quite beautiful in spite of her short little curls. I am not sure that she might not, when she grew older, be very near as great a beauty as her godmamma. She did not make any answer, but bit her lips, and set her little red mouth, and looked a very little sprite of mischief and saucy daring. She was not abashed by what I said to her. She was a thoughtless child, aware only of a strange mischievous power she had, and thinking no harm.

"For I know," said I, half to myself, "that poor Mr. Luigi will come back. I

feel as if I had known him half a lifetime ago. His voice is a voice I used to hear when I was young. I can't tell whose voice it is, but I know it. He'll come back here. He won't find the lady in Manchester, or any other chester; he'll find her in Cheshire, if he finds her at all."

"Did godmamma Sarah say so?" cried Sara, suddenly losing her own self-consciousness in her interest in this bit of mystery.

"Child, do not be rash," cried I, in some agitation. "Your godmamma knows nothing about her; it is all a mistake."

"Did you ask her?" said Sara. "Godmamma, it is written in her face. When the rector was speaking, when you were speaking, even when I was speaking, it was quite evident she knew her abroad, and remembered who she was; but she will not tell. It is not a guess; I am perfectly sure of it. She knows all about her, and she will not tell."

"It is quite a mistake, Sara," cried I, trembling in spite of myself. "She has taken some fancy into her head about Mr. Luigi, some merely visionary notion that he has some bad intention, I cannot tell you what. But I am certain she knows nothing about this Countess. Child, don't think you know better than anybody else! I have thought a great deal about it, and made up my mind. Your godmamma has grown fanciful, she has taken this into her head. Don't be rash in speaking of your fancies; it might give her pain;— and your idea is all a mistake."

"Will you ask her? or will you let me ask her?" cried Sara. "If she says 'No,' I shall be satisfied."

"I will do no such thing," said I. "She is my only sister, I will do nothing to molest or vex her; and, Sara, while I am here, neither shall you."

Sara did not say anything for a few minutes. She allowed me to pick up my

letter in silence, for we had finished breakfast. She let me gather up my papers and ring the bell, and make my way to the door. Then, as I stood there waiting for Ellis, she brushed past me rapidly. "God-mamma," said Sara, looking into my face for a moment, "all the same, *she knows*," and had passed the next instant, and was gliding upstairs before I had recovered my composure. How pertinacious she was! Against my will this had an effect on me.

CHAPTER VIII.

Great and many were my musings what steps I ought to take; or, indeed, whether I ought to take any steps in the strange dilemma I was in. I considered of it till my head ached. What if Sarah's mind were possibly just at that delicate point when means of cure might be effectual? but how could *I* bring her to any means of cure? There have been many miserable stories told about false imputations of insanity and dreadful cruelties and injustice following, but I almost think there might be as many and as sad on the other side, about friends watching in agony, neither able nor willing to take any steps until it

was too late, far too late, for any good. This was the situation I felt myself in; no matter whether I was right or wrong in my opinion, this was how I felt myself. I suppose nobody can think of madness appearing beside them in the person of their nearest companion, without a dreadful thrill and terror at their heart; but at the same time I felt that, however inevitable this might be, I must first come to it unmistakably. I must first see it, hear it, beyond all possibility of doubt, before I ventured to whisper it even to the secret ear of a physician.

All this floated through my mind with that dreadful faculty of jumping at conclusions that imagination always has. Did ever anybody meet with any great misfortune, which had been hanging some time over them, without going through it a thousand times before the blow really fell, and the dreadful repetition was done away with once and for ever? How many times over and over, sleeping

and waking, does the death-bed watcher go through the parting that approaches before it really comes? Dying itself, I think, — one naturally thinks what kind of a process that is, as one comes near the appointed natural period of its coming, — dying itself must be rehearsed so often, that its coming at last is a real relief to the tired actor. Not only does what is real go through a hundred performances in one's imagination, but many a scene appals us that, thank heaven, we are never condemned to go through with. I could not see before me what was to happen, nor into Sarah's mind to know what was astir there; but I tortured myself all the same, gathering all the proofs of this new dismal light thrown upon her, in my mind. All insane people make up a persecutor or pursuer for themselves. Poor Sarah had found hers in the strange face, —it was so unusual in our quiet roads to see a strange face!—which she met all at once and without warning, on the quiet road.

I recollected every incident, and everything confirmed my idea. She had taken a panic all at once, — she had driven five miles round to get out of his way; from that hour painful watchfulness and anxiety had come to her face. Carson was sent out to see that the road was clear, before, poor soul, she would venture out, though with the carriage blinds drawn down. Ah! I think if my only communication with the open air and the out-of-doors world was in the enclosure of that carriage with the blinds drawn down, I should certainly go mad, and quickly too! I had a long afternoon by myself in the library that day. I went back, as well as my memory would carry me, into the history of the Mortimers. Insanity was not in our family,—no trace of it. We had never been very clever, but we had been obstinately sane and sober-minded. My mother's family too, the Stamfords, so far as I know, were all extremely steady people. It is odd when

one individual of a family, and no more, shows a tendency to wander; at sixty, too, and all of a sudden, with no possible reason. But who can search into the ways of Providence? It might perhaps never go any further; it might be the long silence of her life, and perhaps long brooding over such things as may have happened to her in the course of it. Something must have happened to Sarah; she was not like me. She had really lived her life, and had her own course in the world. She had known her own bitternesses, too, no doubt, or she — she, the great beauty, the heiress, — would not have been Sarah Mortimer sitting voiceless by the fireside. She had been too silent, had too much leisure to go over her life. Her brain had rusted in the quietness; terrors had risen within her that took form and found an execution for themselves whenever, without any warning, she saw a strange face. This explained everything. I could see it all quite clear

with this interpretation; and without this nothing could explain it; for the young Italian looking for his friend, the lady whom nobody had ever heard of, could be nothing in the world to Sarah Mortimer.

Thinking over this, it naturally occurred to me that it would be important to let my poor sister know that this innocent young object of her fears had left the neighbourhood. It might, even, who knows? restore the balance to her poor mind. I got up from my chair the moment I thought of that, but did not go out of the library quite so quickly as you might have supposed, either. I was afraid of Sarah's passions and reproaches; I always was. She had a way of representing everybody else as so unkind to her, poor dear soul, and of making out that she was neglected and of no consequence. Though I knew that this was not the case, I never could help feeling uncomfortable. Perhaps if I could only have put myself in her place, I might

have felt the same; but it made me very timid of starting any subject before her that she did not like, even though it might be to relieve her mind.

I went slowly into the drawing-room. I thought most likely little Sara was dressing upstairs, and we two would have a little time by ourselves. When I went into the great room it was lying in the twilight, very dim and shadowy. The great mirror looked like another dimmer world added on to this one which was already so dim,—a world all full of glimpses and gliding figures, and brightened up by the gleams of the firelight which happened to be blazing very bright and cheerful. There were no curtains closed nor blinds down. Four great long windows, each let into the opposite wall a long strip of sky, and grass, and leafless trees, giving one a strange idea of the whole world outside, the world of winds, and hills, and rivers, and foreign unknown people. It was not light that came in at these

windows; it was a sort of gray luminous darkness, that led your eyes up to the sky and blurred everything underneath. But in the centre of the room burned that ruddy centre of fire, a light which is quite by itself, and is not to be compared to anything else. Straight before me, as I stood at the door, was Sarah's screen, shutting out as much light as it could, and of course concealing her entirely; but beyond, full in the ruddy light on the other side of the screen, with the red fire reddening all over her velvet jacket, her glossy hair, and the white round arms out of those long wide sleeves, sat little Sara Cresswell, on a footstool opposite her godmamma, and talking to her. I cannot say Sara was in a pretty attitude. Young ladies now-a-days are sadly careless in their ways. She was stooping quite double, with one of her hands thrust into her hair, and the fire scorching her complexion all to nothing; and one of the long, uncovered windows, with the blind drawn up to the

very top, you may be sure by Sara's own wilful hands, was letting in the sky light over her, like a very tall spirit with pale blue eyes, so chilly, and clear, and pale, that it looked the oddest contrast possible to the firelight and the little velvet kitten there in front of it, all scorched and reddened over, as you could fancy; velvet takes on that surface tint wonderfully. I could see nothing of Sarah in the shelter of her screen; but there sat the little puss in velvet, straight before her, talking to her as nobody else ever ventured to talk. I have been long telling you how that fireside scene looked, just to get my breath. I had been trying to work myself up to the proper pitch to enter upon that subject again with my poor dear sister. But lo! here had little Sara come on her own account and got it all over. I could see at a glance that there was no more to be said.

I came forward quietly and dropped into

my own seat without saying anything. Dear, dear! had it been an insane, unreasonable terror, or had it been something real and serious that she knew, and she alone? Sarah was leaning a little towards the fire, rubbing the joints of her fingers, which were rheumatic, as I have mentioned before; but it was not what she was doing that struck me; it was the strange look of ease and comfort that had somehow come upon her. Her whole person looked as if it had relaxed out of some bondage. Her head drooped a little in a kind of easy languor: her muslin shawl, lined with pale blue, hung lightly off her shoulders. Her pins were laid down orderly and neat on her basket with the wools. Her very foot was at ease on the footstool. How was it? If it had been incipient madness, could this grateful look of rest have come so easily? Would the fever have gone down only at knowing he was away? Heaven knows! I sat all silent in my own

chair in the shadow, and felt the water moisten my old eyes. What she must have gone through before this sudden ease could show itself so clearly in every limb and movement! What an iron bondage she must have been putting on! What a relief this was! Her comfort and sudden relaxation struck me dumb. I was appalled at the sight of it. My notion about insanity, dreadful to think of, but still natural and innocent, was shaken; a restless uneasiness of a different description rose upon my mind. Could he indeed be anything to her, this young stranger? Could she in her own knowledge have some mysterious burden which was connected with his coming or going? Could she have *recognised*, instead of only finding an insanely fanciful destiny in his strange face? Impossible! That foreign life of hers, so obscure and mysterious to me, was of an older period than his existence. *He* could bring no gossip, no recollections to confound her. At the

time of her return he could scarcely have been born. Thus I was plunged into a perfect wilderness of amazed questions again.

When little Sara went off to dress,—she dressed every evening, though we never saw anybody,—I stole to the door after her, and caught her little pink ear outside the door in the half-lighted hall. She gave a little shriek when I came suddenly behind her. I believe she thought I was angry, and came to take her punishment into my own hand.

"What did you say to your godmamma, Sara?" said I.

"Nothing," said the perverse child. Then, after a little pause, "I told her that your Mr. Luigi was gone, godmamma; and that he was a very pretty-behaved young man; and asked her who the Countess Sermoneta was."

"You did?"

"Yes; but she did not mind," said Sara.

"I am not sure if she heard me; she gave such a long sigh, half a year long. Godmamma Sarah's heart must be very deep down if it took *that* to ease it; and melted all out, as if frost was over somehow, and thaw had come."

"Ah! and what more?" said I.

"Nothing more," cried the child. "Don't you think I have a little heart, godmamma? If she felt it so, could I go poking at her with that Countess's name? Ah! you should have seen her. She thawed out as if the sun was shining and the frost gone."

"Ah!" I cried again. It went to my heart as well. "Come down and talk, little Sara," said I, and so went back to the drawing-room, where she sat looking so eased and relieved, poor soul, poor soul! I was very miserable. I had not the heart to ring for lights. I sat down in my chair with all sorts of dismal thoughts in my heart. She did not speak either. She was

rubbing her rheumatic fingers, and taking in all the warmth and comfort. She looked as if somehow she had escaped — good heavens! from what?

CHAPTER IX.

Next day that change upon Sarah's whole appearance continued, and throughout the whole week. She was like herself once more. Carson made no more stealthy expeditions out of doors before my sister set out on her drive. Sarah did not stir in her chair and eye me desperately when the door opened. She even seemed to fall deaf again with that old, soft, slight hardness of hearing which I used to suspect in her. There was no pressure on her heart to startle her ears.

While I in the meantime tried my best to think nothing about it, tried to turn a blank face towards what might happen,

and to take the days as they came. I have not come to be fifty without having troubles in plenty. For the last dozen years, to be sure, there had been only common embarrassments. The fewer people one has to love, the fewer pleasures and joys are possible, the less grow our sorrows. It is cold comfort, but it is a fact notwithstanding. Grief and delight go hand in hand in full lives; when we are stinted down into a corner both fall off. We suffer less, we enjoy less; we suffer nothing, we enjoy nothing in time, only common pricks and vexations, which send no thrill to the slumbering heart. So we had been living for years; happy enough, nothing to disturb us; or not happy at all, if you choose to take that view of the subject; true either way. Not such a thing as real emotion lighting upon our house, only secondary feelings; no love to speak of, but kindness; no joy, but occasional pleasure; no grief, but sometimes regret. A very composed

life, which had been broken in upon quite suddenly by a bewildering shadow,—tragic fear, doubt, alarm, — sudden mystery no ways explainable, or madness explainable but hopeless. In this pause of dismay and doubt, while the dark, unknown, inexplicable figure had turned away from the door a little, it was hard to turn from its fascination and go quietly back to that quiet life.

Little Sara Cresswell came much about me in the library in those days; she interested herself in my business much; she tried to interfere with my work and help me, as the kitten called it. All the outlays on the estate, the works that were going on, the improvements I loved to set a-going, — which did not all come to anything, — and the failures, of which to be sure there were plenty—pleased the impatient creature mightily. I was considered rather speculative and fanciful among the Cheshire squires; they did not approve of my goings

on; they thought me a public nuisance for preserving no game, and making a fuss about cottages. But I am sorry to say little Sara did not agree with the squires. She thought my small bits of improvements very slow affairs indeed; she grew indignant at my stinginess and contracted ideas. She thought any little I did was just preliminary attempts not worth mentioning. When was I to begin the work in earnest she wanted to know?

"What work, Sara?"

"What work? Why, here are you, godmamma, an old lady—you will never grow any wiser or any better than you are," cried the intolerable child. "You can't get any more good out of all that belongs to the Park than just your nice little dinners, and teas, and the carriage, and the servants, and, perhaps, half-a-dozen dresses in the year,—though I do believe three would be nearer true,—and to keep all these farms, and fields, and meadows, and

orchards, and things, all for godmamma Sarah and you! Don't you feel frightened sometimes when you wake up suddenly at night?"

"You saucy little puss!—why?" cried I.

"To think of the poor," said Sara, with a solemn look. She held herself straight up, and looked quite dignified as she turned her reproving eyes on me. "Quantities of families without any homes, quantities of little children growing up worse than your pigs, godmamma, quantities of people starving, and living, and crowding, and quarrelling in black streets not as broad as this room, with courts off from them, like those horrid, frightful places in Liverpool. While out here you are living in your big rooms, in your big house, with the green park all round and round you, and farmers, and gardeners, and cottagers, and servants, and all sorts of people, working to make you comfortable; with more money than you know what to do with, and everything be-

longing to yourself, and nobody to interfere with you. And why have you any right to it more than *them?*"

Little Sara's figure swelled out, and her dark eyes shone bright as she was speaking. It took away my breath. "Are you a Chartist, child?" I cried.

"I think I am a Socialist," said Sara, very composedly; "but I don't quite know. I think we should all go shares. I have told you so a dozen times, godmamma. Suppose papa has twelve hundred a year, —I do believe he has a great deal more,— isn't it dreadful? and all, not out of the ground like yours, but from worrying people into lawsuits and getting them into trouble. Well, suppose it was all divided among a dozen families, a hundred a year. People can live very comfortably, I assure you, godmamma, upon a hundred a year."

"Who told you, child?" said I.

"The curate has only eighty," said Sara; "his wife dresses the baby and makes all

its things herself, and they have very comfortable little dinners. The window in my old nursery—the end window you know—just overlooks their little parlour. They look so snug and comfortable when the baby is good. To be sure it must be a bore taking one's dinner with the baby in one's lap; and I am sure she is always in a fright about visitors coming. I think it would be quite delightful to give them one of papa's hundreds a year."

"In addition to their eighty?" said I. "Why, then, there is an end of going shares."

Sara coughed and stammered for a moment over this, quite at fault; but not being troubled either about logic or consistency, soon plunged on again as bold as ever.

"Whatever you say, godmamma, people can live quite comfortably on a hundred a year. I have reckoned it all up; and I don't see really any reason why anybody

should have more. Only fancy what a quantity of hundreds a year you and god-mamma Sarah might distribute if you would. And, instead of that, you only build a few cottages and give a few people work — work! as if they had not as good a right as anybody to their living. People were not born only to work, and to be miserable, and to die."

"People were born to do a great many harder things than you think for, Sara," said I. "Do you think I am going to argue with a little velvet kitten like you? I advise you to try your twelve families on the twelve hundreds a year. But what do you suppose you would do if your god-mamma and I, having no heirs, left the Park to you, and you had your will, and might do what you pleased?"

What put this into my head I cannot say; but I gave it utterance on the spur of the moment. Sara stared at me for a moment, with her pretty mouth falling a little

open in astonishment. Then she jumped up and clapped her hands. "Do, godmamma!" she cried out, "oh do; such a glorious scatter I should make! everybody should have enough, and we'd build the loveliest little chapel in existence to St. Millicent, if there is such a saint. I have always thought it would be perfectly delightful to be a great heiress. Godmamma, do!"

To see her all sparkling with delight and eagerness quite charmed me. Had she ever heard a hint of being left heiress to the Park, of course she must have looked wretched and conscious. Anybody would that had thought of such a great acquisition. Sara had not an idea of that. She thought it the best fun possible. She clapped her hands and cried, "Do, godmamma!" She was as bold as an innocent little lion, without either guile or fear.

"It should be tied down so that you could not part with a single acre, nor

give away above five pounds at a time," said I.

"Ah!" said Sara, thoughtfully; "I daresay there would be a way of cheating you somehow though, godmamma," she said, waking up again with a touch of malice. "People are always cheated after they are dead. I knew a dear old lady that would not have her portrait taken for anybody but one friend whom she loved very much; but, what do you think? after she was gone they found the wicked wretch of a photographic man had kept the *thing*, — the negative they call it, — and printed scores of portraits, and let everybody have one. I would have given my little finger to have had one; but to go and cheat her, and baulk her after she was dead, and all for love, that is cruel. I would rather go against what you said right out, godmamma, than go against what I knew was in your heart."

"Ah, Sara, you don't know anything

about it," said I. "If you had a great deal of money all to yourself, and could do anything you liked with it, — as heaven knows you may have soon enough! — and were just as foolish with it as you intend, how disgusted you would be with your charity, to be sure, after a while! What a little misanthrope you would grow! What mercenary, discontented wretches you would think all the people! I think I can see you fancying how much good you were doing, and yet doing only harm instead. Then that disagreeable old fellow, experience, would take you in hand. The living are cheated as well as the dead. We are all cheated, and cheat ourselves. Nothing would make me go and have my portrait taken; but I don't deny if I found out that people had got it spontaneously, and handed it about among themselves all for love, I should not be angry. You are a little goose. You don't know what manner of spirit you are of."

"It is very easy talking, godmamma," said Sara. "I was watching yesterday when godmamma Sarah went out for her drive. The groom and the boy were hard at work ever so long with the carriage and horses before it was ready. I saw them out of the window of Alice's room while she was mending my dress for me. Then came old Jacob to the door with the carriage. Then came godmamma Sarah leaning on Carson's arm to go downstairs. So there were two great horses and four human creatures, — three men and a woman, — all employed for ever so long to give one old lady a half-hour's drive; when a walk would have done her twenty times as much good," concluded the child hastily, under her breath.

"You speak in a very improper manner; — an old lady! You ought to have more respect for your godmamma," said I, indignantly. "Your godmamma has nothing

that is not perfectly suitable to her condition of life."

"But godmamma Sarah *is* an old lady, whether I am respectful or not," said the girl stoutly. "When I see ladies driving about I wonder at them. Two great horses that could fight or plough; and two great men that might do the same; and all occupied about one lady's drive! If I were queen I would do away with drives! Ah! shouldn't I like to be Semiramis, the Semiramis of the story, that persuaded the king to let her be queen for a day, and turned everything upside down, and then ——"

"Cut off the king's head. Would you do it, Sara, after he had trusted you?" said I.

Sara came to a sudden pause. "I would not mind about cutting off his head; but, to be sure, being *trusted* is different. As if it were not a story, not a word true! But please, godmamma," cried the wild creature,

making me a curtsey, "don't leave me the Park. I don't want to be trusted, please. I want to have my own way."

Which was the truest word she ever said.

CHAPTER X.

The days wore away thus in talks with little Sara, and vague expeditions out of doors, a misty sort of confused life. I felt as one feels when one knows of some dreadful storm, or trial, that has passed over for a little, only to come on again by and by. After seeing Sarah show so much feeling of one kind and another,—distress, anxiety, and apprehension one day, and comfort and relief another,—I could not bind myself with the thought that this could possibly pass off and come to nothing. Such things don't happen once and get done with. There was a secret reason somewhere working all the same,

either in her own mind alone, or in the past and her history as well; and one time or other it must make its appearance again. Whether it was her mind giving way; and in that case it did not matter whether Mr. Luigi came back or not, for if he did not appear, fancy would, doubtless, seize upon some other; or whether it was some person this young man resembled, or some part of her life which she was afraid to hear of again which he recalled to her, in any case it was sure to break out some other day; and I cannot tell what a strange uncomfortable excitement it brought into my life, and how the impulse of watching came upon me. Sarah's smallest motions got a meaning in my eyes. I could not take things easily as I had used to do. She had always, of course, been very important in the house; but she had been a kind of still life for a long time now. She would not be consulted about leases or improvements, or anything done on the estate.

So long as everything was very comfortable and nice about her,—the fire just to her liking, which Ellis managed to a nicety; the cooking satisfactory; her wools nicely matched, and plenty of new patterns; her screen just in the proper position, protecting her from the draught; and the *Times* always ready when she was ready for it,—Sarah got on, as it appeared, very comfortably. Despite all that, to be sure she would get angry sometimes; but I was used to it, and did not mind much. Only to think that a person, who had either in the past or in her own mind something to work her up to such a pitch of excitement, *could* live such a life! She seemed to have quite resumed it now with a strange kind of unreasoning self-consolation. If it was the Italian that disturbed her, how could she persuade herself that he was not coming back again? Her quiet falling back into her old way was inexplicable to me.

I seemed to myself to stand just then in a very strange position. Sarah on one side of me all shut up and self-secluded, with a whole life all full of strange incidents, dazzling, brilliant, unforgotten years, actual things that had happened locked in her silent memory; and little Sara on tiptoe, on the other side, eager to plunge in her own way into the life she dreamt of, but knew nothing about. All the wild notions of the little girl, her ridiculous-wise opinions, poor dear child, her principles of right and justice with which she would rule the world, and all her innocent break-downs and failures, ever in her fancy, came pouring down upon me, pelting me at all times. And on the other side was my sister, content to spend her life in that easy-chair, my sister whom I knew nothing about, whose memory could go out of the Park drawing-room into exciting scenes and wonderful events which I had never heard of. How strange it was! I don't re-

member much that I did in those days. I lived under a confused, uneasy cloud, ready enough to be amused with Sara's philosophy. I am not sure that I was not all the more disposed to smile at and tease the dear child, and be amused by all the new ideas she started, for the troubled sensation in my own mind. Nothing could have happened, I think, that would have surprised me. Sometimes it came into my head whether my father could have done or tried to do, something when he was abroad, to cut us off from the succession; and once I jumped bolt upright out of my seat, thinking—what if my father had married abroad and had a son, and we were living usurpers, and Sarah knew of it! How that idea did set my heart beating! If I had not been so much frightened for her passions, I should have gone to her directly and questioned her. But to be sure my father was not the man to leave off his own will for any consideration about his

daughters; and would have been only too proud to have had a son. After thinking, I gave up that idea; but my heart went at a gallop for hours after, and I should not have been surprised to hear that anything had happened, or was going to happen. Really, anything real and actual, however bad, would have been a relief from the mystery which preyed upon me.

"Papa is coming to fetch me, to-morrow," said Sara Cresswell, in rather a discontented tone. "There is to be some ridiculous ball, or something. Can anybody imagine anything so absurd as asking people to a ball when you want to show you're sorry to part with them? and papa might have known, if he had ever taken the trouble to think, that I have no dress ——"

"Sara, child! how many hundreds a year do you give your dressmaker?" said I.

"That has nothing whatever to do with it, godmamma," said Sara, making a slightly confused pause; and then resum-

ing, with a defiant look into my face, — "if I might give one hundred a year away out of all papa has got, I could live upon one dress in a year; but what is the use of shillings and sixpences to beggars, or of saving up a few pounds additional to papa? I don't call that any economy. If we were living according to nature, it would be quite different; then I should want no ball-dresses. Besides," continued the refractory creature, "I don't want to go; and if papa insists on me going, why shouldn't I get some pleasure out of it? Everything else will just be the same as usual, of course. — Godmamma," exclaimed Sara suddenly, with a new thought, "will you ask papa anything about this business? it is not done with yet. He will come back, and all will have to be gone over again. Will you mention it to papa?"

She had been thinking of it too,—she, so thoughtless as she was, found something in it not of a kind to die away and be passed

over. I could not mistake, nor pretend to mistake, what she meant; it was to be read in her very eyes.

"My dear, I have told you already that your godmamma can have nothing whatever to do with this young man," said I, with a little irritation; "if she is out of sorts it is nobody's business. Do you fancy she could keep up an acquaintance with an Italian countess for more than twenty years, and I know nothing of it? Nonsense! Some fancy, or some old recollections, or something, had an effect upon her just at the moment. Speak to your father! Why, you told me he knew nothing about the Countess Sermoneta. Shall I ask him to feel your godmamma's pulse and prescribe for her? or do you suppose, even if he were fit for that, your godmamma would allow it, without feeling herself ill? Your papa is highly respectable, and has always been much trusted by the family. But there are things with which one's solicitor

has nothing whatever to do; there are things which belong to one's self, and to nobody else in the world."

Poor little Sara! I did not mean to mortify the child! She grew crimson with pride and annoyance. I had no intention of reminding her that she was only the attorney's daughter; but she reminded herself of it on the instant, with all the pride of a duchess. She did not say a syllable, the little proud creature; but turned away with such an air, her cheek burning, her eyes flashing, her little foot spurning the ground. She went off with a great sweep of her full skirts, disturbing the air to such an extent that I quite felt the breeze on my cheek. Perhaps it was just as well. Of course there was a difference between the Mortimers and the Cresswells. Because we did not stand on our dignity, people were so ready to forget what they owed to us. It was just as well the spoiled child should learn, for once in her life, that it was

all of grace and favour that she was made so much of at the Park.

I made quite sure that she went to her own room directly, to see after the packing of her things, with some thoughts of starting for home at once, without even waiting for her father. However, when she began to talk to her little maid Alice, about that ball-dress, I daresay the other matter went out of the child's head. The next that I saw of her was when she made a rush downstairs to ask me for postage stamps, with a letter in her hand, all closed and ready to go off. She was still pouting and ill-tempered; but she contrived to show me the address of the letter. Alas, poor dear Bob Cresswell! it was to the Chester milliner, the best one we had, no doubt ordering a dress for the ball. Yet I do believe, for all that, the child could really have done what she said. I believe, if some great misfortune had happened, and her father had lost all his money, Sara's first

impulse would have been to clap her hands and cry, "Now everybody shall see!" Of course it is very dreadful to lose one's fortune and become poor and have to work. But I wonder are there no other spoiled creatures in the world like Sara, who have their own ideas about such calamities, and think they would be the most famous fun in the world? Too much of anything makes a revulsion in the mind. Such over-indulged, capricious, spoiled children have often hardy bold spirits, and would be thankful for some real, not sham necessity. But, in the meantime, she had not the slightest idea of doing without her ball-dress.

CHAPTER XI.

Mr. Cresswell came next day accordingly. I confess the very sight of him was a sort of solace to me in my perplexities; that solid steady man, with his sharp keen eyes and looks, as if he knew everything going on round about him. To be sure, being a lawyer, he must have pretended to know a great many more things than he could have any insight into. Still, when one is in great doubt, and cannot tell where to turn, the sight of one of these precise men, with a vast knowledge about other people, and no affairs of their own of any consequence, is a kind of relief to one. Such men can throw light on quantities of things quite

out of their way. I could not help saying to myself, though I had snubbed Sara for saying it, that he might, perhaps, have helped to clear up this mystery. But, of course, he was always a last resort if anything more happened. They were to have dinner before they went away, and Mr. Cresswell reached the Park by noon; so there was plenty of time to tell him anything. He came into the drawing-room rubbing his hands. Sarah had just come downstairs and taken her seat. She was looking just as she always did, no tremble in her head to speak of, her attention quite taken up with her wools, attending to what was said, but with no anxiety about it. When Mr. Cresswell came in her face changed a little; she looked as if all at once she had thought of something, and gave me a sign, which I knew meant he was to come to her. I brought him directly, not without a great deal of curiosity. It was a warm day for the season; and just immediately before the

fire, where the good man had to sit to listen, was not just the most comfortable position in the world. He even contrived to make a kind of appeal to me. Couldn't I hear what it was, and tell him afterwards? I took no notice; I confess it was rather agreeable to me than otherwise, — to set him down there to get roasted before the fire.

"I want to know what you have done about Richard Mortimer," said Sarah in her shrill whisper; "there have been no advertisements in the *Times* nor the Chester papers. I hope you are not losing time; what have you done?"

It struck me that Mr. Cresswell looked just a little abashed and put out by this question; but it might be the fire. He put up his hand to shelter his face, and hitched round his chair; then shrugged his shoulders a little, insinuating that she was making far too much of it. "My dear lady, advertisements are the last resort. I hope to do without any such troublesome process," said

Mr. Cresswell. "All the Mortimers in England will rouse up at the sight of an advertisement. I should prefer to take a little time. Information is always to be obtained privately when one has any clue at all."

"Then have you obtained any private information?" said Sarah, in rather a sharp tone. She had no inclination to let him slide away till she was quite satisfied.

"Such things take their time," said Mr. Cresswell, devoting all his attention to screening himself from the fire. "How you ladies can bear cooking yourselves up so, on this mild day, I cannot understand! I can hear you perfectly, Miss Mortimer, thank you; your voice is as distinct as it always was, though, unfortunately, not the same tone. What a voice your sister used to have, to be sure! — went through people's hearts like a bell."

This was addressed to me, in the idea of being able to wriggle out of the conversa-

tion altogether. It is my conviction he had not taken a single step in the matter of Richard Mortimer; but if he thought he could shake off Sarah's inquiries so, he deceived himself. She never was, all her life, to be turned from her own way.

"It is some time now since we instructed you on this subject," said Sarah. "If you have not made any discovery, at least you can tell us what you are doing. Milly, there, like a fool, does not care. She talks of Providence dropping us an heir at our door, —a foundling, I suppose, with its name on a paper pinned to its frock," said Sarah, growing rather excited, and turning an angry look on me.

To my astonishment Mr. Cresswell also looked at me; his was a guilty, conscious, inquiring look. What strange creatures we all are! This shrewd lawyer, far from thinking that Sarah's words referred to any mysterious trouble or derangement in her own mind, took them up, knowing his own

thoughts, with all the quickness of guilt, to refer to Sara! He thought we had probably had a quarrel about leaving her our heiress; that I had stood up for her, and Sarah had opposed it. So he turned his eyes to me to see if I would make any private telegraphic communication to him of the state of affairs. And when he found nothing but surprise in my eyes, turned back a little disappointed, but quite cool and ready to stand to his arms, though he had failed of this mark.

"The truth is, there is nothing so easy as finding an heir. I'll ensure you to hunt him up from the backwoods, or China, or anywhere in the world. There's a fate connected with heirs," said Mr. Cresswell, pleasantly, "whether one wants them or not they turn up with all their certificates in their pocket-books! Ah! they're a long-lived, sharp-sighted race; they're sure to hear somehow when they're wanted. Don't be afraid—we'll find him, sure enough. If

you had made up your minds to disown him, and shut him out, he'd turn up all the same."

"Milly," cried Sarah suddenly, with her little shriek of passion, all so unexpected and uncalled for that I fairly jumped from the table I was standing at, and had nearly overturned her screen on the top of her, "what do you mean by that fixed look at me? How dare you look so at me? Did I speak of disowning any one? Richard Mortimer, when he's found, shall have the Park that moment, if I lived a dozen years after it. Nobody shall venture, so long as I live, to cast suspicious looks at me!"

I declare, freely, I was as unconscious of looking at her as though I had been a hundred miles away at the moment! I stood perfectly still, gaping with consternation and amazement. Such an unwarranted, unexpected accusation, fairly took away my breath. Mr. Cresswell, accustomed to observe people, was startled, and woke up

from those dreams of his own which clouded his eyesight in this particular case. He looked at her keenly for a moment, then, turned with a rapid question in his eyes to me; he seemed to feel in a moment there was somehow some strange new element in the matter. But, of course, I had no answer to make to him, either with voice or eyes.

"I was not looking at you at all, Sarah," faltered I. "I was not looking at anything in particular. Nobody is going to be disowned, that I know of. Nobody is seeking our property, that I know of," I said again involuntarily, my eye turning with a kind of stupid consciousness, the very last feeling in the world which I wished or intended to show, upon Mr. Cresswell, who was quite watching my looks to see what this little episode meant.

He coloured up in a moment. He stumbled up from his chair, looking very much confused. He dared not pretend to know what I meant, nor show himself conscious,

even that I had looked at him. He went across the room to the window, looked out, and came back again. It was odd to see such a man, accustomed and trained to conceal his sentiments, so betrayed into showing them. When he sat down again he turned his face to the fire, and almost his back to me. Matters had changed. It appeared I was not such a safe confidant as he had supposed.

"You shall very soon be satisfied about Mr. Richard Mortimer," he said, looking into the fire. "Don't be afraid; I am on the scent; you may trust it to me. But, really, I don't wonder to see Miss Milly take it very reasonably. What do you want with heirs yet? If I had any thoughts of that kind, I should put all my powers in motion to get that little kitten of mine married. If I leave her by herself she will throw away my poor dear beautiful dividends in handfuls. But, somehow, the idea doesn't oppress me; and, of course, I

am older than any lady in existence can be supposed to be. I am ——"

"Hold your tongue, Cresswell," cried Sarah crossly. "I daresay we know what each other's ages are. Attend to business, please. I want Richard Mortimer found, I tell you. You can tell him his cousin Sarah wants him. He will come, however far off he may be, when he hears that. You can put it in the papers, if you please."

Saying this Sarah gave her muslin scarf a little twitch over her elbow, and held up her head with a strange little vain self-satisfied movement. Oh, how Mr. Cresswell did look at her! how he chuckled in his secret soul! From what I had seen once before I understood perfectly well what he meant. He had once taken the liberty to fall in love with Sarah Mortimer himself; and now to see the old faded beauty putting on one of her old airs, and reckoning on the fidelity of a man who, no doubt—it was to be hoped, or what was to become of our search

for heirs?—had married and forgotten all about her years ago — tickled him beyond measure. He felt himself quite revenged when he saw her self-complacence. He ventured to chuckle at it secretly. I should have liked, above all things, to box his ears.

"Ah! to be sure; I'll use all possible means immediately. It's to be hoped he has ten children," said Mr. Cresswell, with a very quiet private laugh. Sarah did not observe that he was laughing at her. I believe such an idea could never have entered her head. She began, with an habitual motion she had got whenever she left off knitting, to rub her fingers and stoop to the fire.

"And I insist you should come and report to us what you are doing," said Sarah; "and never mind Milly; see me. It is I who am interested. Milly, as I tell you, thinks Providence will drop her an heir at the door."

What could she mean by these spiteful sneering suggestions? I had thought no

more of heirs for many a day — never since I got involved in this bewildering business, which I could see no way through. Her sudden attack sent a little thrill of terror through me. *I* was casting suspicious looks at her; an heir was to be dropped at our door; somebody was plotting against her fortune and honour. Good heavens! what could it mean but one thing? Mad people are always watched, pursued, persecuted, thwarted. I was cast from one guess to another, as if from wave to wave of a sea. I came back to that idea again; and trembled in spite of myself to think of little Sara and her father leaving us, and of being left alone to watch the insane haze spreading over her mind. It was sure to spread if it was there.

CHAPTER XII.

I WILL not undertake to say that we were a particularly sociable party at dinner that day. The stranger, Mr. Cresswell, who might have been supposed likely to give us a little news, and refresh us with the air of out of doors, was constrained and uncomfortable with the idea of having been found out. I am sure it was the last idea in the world which I wanted to impress upon him. But still, in spite of myself, I had betrayed it. Then Sara, without the faintest idea of her father's uneasiness, had a strong remembrance of my unlucky words on the previous day, and was very high and stately by way of proving to me that an attorney's daughter could be quite as proud as a Mor-

timer—as if I ever doubted it!—and a great deal prouder. For really, when one knows exactly what one's position is, and that nobody can change it, one does not stand upon one's defence for every unwary word. However, so it was that we were all a little constrained, and I felt as one generally feels after a pretty long visit, even from a dear friend, that to be alone and have the house to one's self will just at first be a luxury in its way.

Not having any free and comfortable subject to talk of, we naturally fell to books, though Mr. Cresswell, I believe, never opened one. He wanted to know if Sara had been reading novels all day long, and immediately Sara turned to me to ask whether she might have one home with her which she had begun to read. Then there burst on my mind an innocent way of putting a question to Mr. Cresswell which I had been very anxious to ask without seeing any way to do it.

"I don't think you will care for it when you do read it, Sara; it is all about a poor boy who gets persuaded not to marry, and breaks the poor creature's heart who is engaged to him, because there has been madness in the family. High principle, you know. I am not quite so sure in my own mind that I don't think him a humbug; but I suppose it's all very grand and splendid to you young people. Young persons should be trained very closely in their own family history if that is to be the way of it. I hope there never was a Cresswell touched in his brain, or, Sara, it would be a bad prospect for you."

"If you suppose I should think it a bad prospect to do as Gilbert did, you are very wrong, godmamma," cried Sara. "Why shouldn't he have been quite as happy one way as the other? Do you suppose people must be *married* to be happy? it is dreadful to hear such a thing from you!"

"Well, to be sure, so it would be," said I,

"if I had said it. I am not unhappy that I know of, nor happy either. Oh, you little velvet kitten, how do you know how people get through life? One goes jog-jog, and does not stop to find out how one feels. But I'd rather — though I daresay it's very bad philosophy — have creatures like you do things innocently, without being too particular about the results. Besides, I think Cheshire air is good steady air for the mind, — not exciting, you know. I don't think we've many mad people in our county, eh, Mr. Cresswell? — Did you ever hear of a crazy Mortimer?

Mr. Cresswell looked up at me a little curiously — which, to be sure, not having any command over my face, or habit of concealing what I thought, made me look foolish. Sarah lifted her eyes, too, with a kind of smile which alarmed me — a smile of ridicule and superior knowledge. Perhaps I had exposed my fears to both of them by that question. I shrank away

from it immediately, frightened at my own rashness. But Mr. Cresswell would not let me off.

"I have always heard your grand-uncle Lewis was very peculiar," said Mr. Cresswell, — "he that your cousin is descended from. Let us hope it doesn't run in Mr. Richard's family. I suppose there's no reason to imagine that such a motive would prevent *him* from marrying?" he continued, rather spitefully. "And it was no wonder if Lewis Mortimer was a little queer. What could you expect? he was the *second son!* an unprecedented accident. The wonder is that something did not happen in consequence. Oh yes, he was *soft* a little, was your grand-uncle Lewis; but most likely it descended to him from his mother's side of the house."

"And my father was named after him!" cried I, with a certain dismay.

They all laughed, even Sarah. *She* kept her eyes on me as if searching through me

to find out what I meant. She was puzzled a little, I could see. She saw it was not a mere idle question, and wanted to know the meaning. She was not conscious, thank heaven! and people are dismally conscious, as I have heard, when their brain is going. This was a little comfort to me under the unexpected answer I had got, for I certainly never heard of a crazy Mortimer all my life.

"If qualities descended by names, my little kitten would be in luck," said Mr. Cresswell. "But here is a new lot of officers coming, Miss Milly; what would you recommend a poor man to do?"

"Papa!" cried Sara, with blazing indignation, "what does any one suppose the officers are to me? You say so to make my own godmamma despise me, though you know it isn't true! I can bear anything that is true. This is why we always quarrel, papa and I. He does not mind what stories he tells, and thinks it good fun.

I am not a flirt, nor never was — never, even when I was too young to know any better. No, godmamma, no more than you are!—nobody dares say it of me."

We were just rising from table when she made this defence of herself. It was not quite true. I know she tormented that poor boy Wilde as if he had been a mouse, the cruel creature; and I am perfectly convinced that she was much disappointed Mr. Luigi did not come to the Park, because she had precisely the same intentions with regard to him. I must allow, though I was very fond of Sara, that, professing to be mighty scornful and sceptical as to hearts breaking, she loved to try when she had it in her power. I daresay she was not conscious of her wicked arts, she used them by instinct; but it came to much the same thing in the end.

I went out of the room with her, under pretence of seeing that her boxes were nicely packed; I did not say anything about it,

whether I thought her a flirt or not, and she quieted down immediately, with a perception that I had something to say. I drew her into the great window of the hall, when Sarah, and immediately after her Mr. Creswell,—for, of course, to him our early dinner only served as lunch, and no man would dream of sitting over his wine at three o'clock in the afternoon, especially in a lady's house,—had passed into the drawing-room. It was a great round bay-window, at one end of the hall, where our footmen used to lounge in my father's time, when we kept footmen. It had our escutcheon in it, in painted glass, and the lower panes were obscured, I cannot tell why, unless because it made them look ugly. The hall was covered with matting, and the fire had been lighted that day, but must have gone out, it felt so cold.

"Sara, I wish to say to you—not that I don't trust your discretion, my dear child;" said I, "but you might not think I cared—

— don't say anything about your godmamma, or about this Mr. Luiggi, dear—"

I was quite prepared to see her resent this caution, but I was not prepared for the burst of saucy laughter with which the foolish little girl replied to me.

"Oh dear, godmamma, don't be so comical! it isn't Luiggi, its Luidgi, that's how it sounds," cried Sara. "To think of any one murdering the beautiful Italian so! Don't you really think it's a beautiful name?"

"I freely confess I never could see any beauty in Italian, nor any other outlandish tongue," said I. "Luidgi, be it, if that's better. I can't see how it makes one morsel of difference; but you will remember what I say?"

"Luigi simply means Lewis; and how should you be pleased to hear Lewis mispronounced? You said it was your father's name, godmamma," said the incorrigible child.

I turned away, shaking my head. It was

no use saying anything more; most likely she would pay attention to what I said, though she was so aggravating; oh, but she *was* contrairy! Never man spoke a truer word. Nevertheless, as she stood there in her velvet jacket, with her close-cropped pretty curls, and her eyes sparkling with laughter, I could not help admiring her myself. I don't mind saying I am very inconsistent. A little while before, I had been thinking it would be rather pleasant to have the house quiet and to ourselves. Now, I could not help thinking what a gap it would leave when she was gone. Then the child, who at home was led into every kind of amusement (to be sure *procurable in Cheshire*, must be added to this), had been so contented, after all, to live with two old women, whom nobody came to see, except now and then in a morning call; and though she was so wicked, and provoking, and careless, she was at the same time so good and clever (when she pleased) and captivating. One

could have put her in the corner, and kissed her the next moment. As she stood there in the light of the great window, I, who had left her, shaking my head, and reflecting how contrairy she was, went back to kiss her, though I gave her a little shake as well. That is how one always feels to these creatures, half-and-half; ready to punish them and to pet them all at once.

However, after a while (though it was no easy matter getting Sara's trunks on the carriage — I wonder Mr. Cresswell ventured on it, for his poor horse's sake), they went away; and feeling just a little dull after they were gone, and as it was just that good-for-nothing time, which is the worst of an early dinner, the interval between dinner and tea, I set out for a walk down to the village. It was Sarah's day for her drive, and she passed me on the road, and kissed her hand to me out of the carriage window. No blinds down now; and the horses going at their steady pace, rather slowly than

otherwise, wheeling along through the soft hedgerows which began to have some buds on them. I wonder what Jacob thought of it; I wonder what Williams at the lodge had to say on the subject. Such a strange unreasonable change!

CHAPTER XIII.

I CALLED at a good many houses in the village. I am thankful to say I have rarely found myself unwelcome, to the best sort of people at least. Most of us have known each other so long, and have such a long stretch of memory to go back upon together, that we belong to each other in a way. As for the scapegraces, they are a little frightened of me, I confess. They say, Miss Milly comes a-worriting, when I speak my mind to them. I can't say the men reverence me, nor the women bless my influence, as I read they do with some ladies in some of Miss Kate Roberts' books. But we are good friends on the whole. When the men have been drinking,

and spent all their wages, or saucy, and put out of their place, then they try their best to deceive me, to be sure; but I know all their little contrivances pretty well by this time. They don't mean much harm after all, only to persuade one that things are not so bad as they look.

After I had given a glance into the shop where I saw Mr. Luigi's fat servant,—I only saw him once, but yet the place seemed full of that fat, funny, good-humoured, outlandish figure, with his bows and smiles, and loquacious foreign speech, that poor Mrs. Taylor commiserated so deeply—I stepped across to the rectory to make a call there. The poor young shopkeeper, who had a night-class for the men and grown lads, and was really an intelligent, well-meaning young man, had been confiding his troubles to me. They did not care a bit about learning; they did not even want to read. When they did read it was the most foolish books! Poor young Taylor's heart was

breaking over their stupidity. And then, to keep a shop, even a bookshop, hurt his "feelings," poor lad. He had been brought up for a teacher's profession, he said — he even had some experience in "tuition." He had thought he could make a home for his mother and his little sister; and now Dr. Appleby was grumbling that he did not succeed, and thought it his own fault! Poor young fellow! to be sure, he should have gone stolidly through with it, and had no business to have any "feelings." But, you see, people will be foolish in every condition of life.

So I stepped across the road to call on Miss Kate, thinking of him all the way; thinking of him and that unknown young Italian, only once seen, whom the apparition of the fat servant in Taylor's shop somehow connected with the young shopkeeper. How Mr. Luigi had forced himself into all my thoughts! and yet the only one fact I knew about him was, that he was looking for an

apocryphal lady whom nobody ever heard of! Should I have thought no more about him but for Sarah's mysterious agitation? I really cannot tell. Again and again his voice came back to me, independent of Sarah. Whose voice was it? Where had he got that hereditary tone?

Miss Kate was in, for a great wonder. She was wonderfully active in the parish. She was far more the rector, except in the pulpit, than good Dr. Roberts was. I am sure he was very fortunate to have such an active sister. I don't think anything ever happened, within a space of three or four miles round the village, that Miss Kate was not at the bottom of it. Of course I expected to hear everything over again that Dr. Roberts had told us about Mr. Luigi. But, so long as Sarah was not present, I could take that quite easily. Indeed, I wished so much to know more of this stranger, somehow, that I really felt I should be glad to hear all that they had to say.

"I was indeed very much interested in the young man," said Miss Kate, starting the subject almost immediately, as I expected. "I think great efforts should be made to lay hold of every one that comes out of his poor benighted country. I said so to the Doctor; but the Doctor's views, you know, are *very* charitable. Mr. Hubert, however, quite agreed with me. I asked him to come back when he came to this part of the country again, and said I should be very glad to have some *serious* conversation with him. He stared, but he was very polite; only, poor young man, his thoughts are all upon this lady. I have no doubt he thought it was that business I wanted to talk to him about."

"But I suppose, like Dr. Roberts, you could throw no light upon her; who she is, or where she is?" said I. "It is strange he should seem so positive she was here, and yet nobody remembers her. For my own part, if I had once heard it, I am sure

I should never have forgotten that name. I have a wonderful memory for names."

"Very strange no doubt," said Miss Kate, with a little cough. "And then, that man of his. Alas, what an imprisoned soul! To think he should be in the very midst of light and faithful preaching, and yet not be able to derive any benefit from it! I never regretted more deeply not having kept up my own Italian studies. And poor Mr. Hubert — but you would hear all about that; the Doctor does so delight in an amusing story. They could not understand each other in the very least, you know. Ah, what a matter it would be to get hold of that poor Domenico — that's his name. Why, he might be quite an apostle among his countrymen, when he got back. But nothing can be done till he can be taught English, or some agency can be found out in Italian. I can't tell you how much interest I feel in these poor darkened creatures. And to think they should be in the

midst of the light, and no possibility of bringing them under its influence! I don't speak of the master, of course, who knows English very well; but I am not one that am a respecter of persons, — the servant is quite as much, if not more, interesting to me."

"If they stay long I daresay he'll learn English," I suggested modestly; "but it will be a sad pity if the poor gentleman has come so far to seek out this lady, and can't find any trace of her. I promised him to do all I could to find out for him; but nobody seems ever to have heard of her. It will be a thousand pities if he has all his trouble for no end."

"Ah, Miss Milly! let us hope he may acquire something else that will far more than repay him," said Miss Kate; "disappointments are often great blessings in directing one's mind away from worldly things. We were all very much interested in him, I assure you. Mr. Hubert promised to write

to a friend of his in Chester to ask if he could give him any assistance. If it were only for the sake of that strange resemblance, — the Doctor would tell you, of course, the resemblance which struck both him and myself?"

"No," cried I; "did you find out anybody he was like? I only saw him in the dark, and could not make out his face; but his voice has haunted me ever since. I was sure I knew the voice."

"I wonder the Doctor did not mention it," said Miss Kate, with a little importance. "The truth is, it struck us both a good deal; a resemblance to your family, Miss Milly."

I don't know whether I was most disposed to sink down upon my chair or start up from it with a cry; I did neither, however. "To *my* family?" I gasped out.

"Yes; it was very singular," said Miss Kate; "I daresay, of course, it was only one of those accidental likenesses. I remember being once thought very like your

sister. How strange you should think you knew his voice! You have some relations in Italy, perhaps?"

"Not that I know of," said I, feeling very faint. I cannot tell what I was afraid of; but I felt myself trembling and shaken; and I durst not get up and go out either, or Miss Kate would have had it all over the parish before night, that something had gone wrong at the Park.

But I don't remember another word she said. I kept my seat, and answered her till I thought I might reasonably be supposed to have stayed long enough. Then I left the rectory, my mind in the strangest agitation. That this stranger, who had driven Sarah half mad, should be like our family; what a bewildering, extraordinary thing to think of! But stranger still, at this moment, when I had just heard such a wonderful aggravation of my perplexity—that voice of his which had haunted me so long, and which I felt sure I could identify

at once, if the person it once belonged to was named to me, vanished entirely from my mind as if by some conjuring trick. It was extraordinary—it looked almost supernatural. I could no more recall that tone, which I had recalled with perfect freshness and ease when I entered the rectory garden, than I could clear up the extraordinary puzzle thus gathering closer and closer round all my thoughts.

In this state of mind I hurried home, feeling really as if there must be something supernatural in the whole business, and too much startled to ask any definite questions of myself. When I had reached the house, and was going upstairs, I met one of the maids coming down, who had been upon some errand into Sarah's room. This careless girl had left—a thing never seen even when my sister happened to be out for her drives — the room-door open. Before I knew what I was doing, I had stepped inside. I can't tell what I wanted—whether

to speak with Sarah or to spy upon her, or to listen at her door. Carson and she were in the dressing-room, I could hear. And now I will tell you what I did. I don't think I was responsible for my actions at that moment; but whether or not, this is what I did. I stepped forward stealthily, stooped down to the keyhole, and listened at the door!

There! I have said it out. Nobody else knows it to this day. I, who called myself an honourable person, listened at my sister's door. For the first five minutes I was so agitated by my strange position that, of course, I did not hear a word they said. But after a little I began to hear indistinctly that they were talking of some letter that had better be burned—that Carson was speaking in a kind of pleading tone, and Sarah very harsh and hard, her words easier to be distinguished in that hissing whisper of hers than if she had spoken in the clearest voice imaginable. I can't say I was much

the better for the conversation, till at last, just as I was going away, came this, which made my heart beat so loud that I thought it must be heard inside that closed mysterious door:

"And to think they should have called him Lewis, too; though the English is a deal the prettiest. Ah, ma'am," cried Carson, with a little stifled sob, "it showed love in the heart!"

"Yes, for the Park," said Sarah, in her whisper. I dared not stay a moment longer, for I heard them both advancing to the door. I fled to my own room, and dropped down there on my sofa stupefied. My head ached as if it would burst. My heart thumped and beat as if it would leap out of my bosom. Lewis! my father's name—and, good heaven!—the voice! What did it—what could it mean?

PART IV.

THE LIEUTENANT'S WIFE

(*Continued*)

CHAPTER I.

What a strange little quaint place Chester is! I thought I should never have been tired walking along those ramparts, looking over the soft green slopes, and up to the blue hills in the distance, and down here and there upon the gray old churches and the quiet busy little town; but at first we had our lodgings to look for, which was a much more serious matter. I had made up my mind from the very first not to expect to be called upon, nor to go into society; or rather I had set my face against any chance of it, knowing always that we could not do it on the little money we had. But now I found out that Harry was not

content with this. He was very anxious to have better lodgings, where ladies could come to see me. I should say dearer lodgings, for better than Mrs. Saltoun's we could not have had. He wanted me to have quite a drawing-room instead of our nice, cosy, old-fashioned parlour, which was good for everything; and then to think people might be asking us to dinner, and how many embarrassments and troubles we might meet with! For it *is* embarrassing to be asked out, and to be obliged to let the people suppose you are sulky, and ill-tempered, and *wont* go; or else to invent excuses which, besides being sinful, are always sure to be found out; when the real reason is simply that one has not a dress, and cannot afford to get one just then. The other ladies in the regiment might wonder what sort of person I could be, and tell each other that poor young Langham had married some poor girl, and been very foolish. It was exactly true—so he had; and as I can't say I

had any idea that he could be ashamed of me, I took it all very quietly. So long as we were happy, and could afford to live in our own way, I did not mind; but now Harry had got discontented, somehow or other. He was quite in a fuss to think that I was not received as I ought to be, and a great many more things like that—perhaps somebody had said something to him, as if he were supposed to be ashamed of me—at all events he had changed his mind from our first plan; and though I felt quite convinced my way was the wisest, I had to change it as before. Anything was better than having him uncomfortable and discontented. I supported myself with Mrs. Saltoun's opinion, and went with resignation to look at all those expensive lodgings.

The people seemed all to guess that we belonged to the new regiment; and some of them were quite great ladies, and quite enlightened me as to what we should require. For most of the day I was in a perfect

panic; every place seeming dearer than another. When we went into those expensive rooms I always found out something that it was quite impossible for me to tolerate (quite independent, of course, you know, of any question of price!) till Harry quite fretted at my fastidiousness. At last we did find a place *that suited me.* It was no great thing in point of situation. It was a first floor, a front and back drawing-room. I believe, candidly, that the back room was about as big as Mrs. Saltoun's good substantial old dining-table, which we used to have in our sitting-room in Edinburgh; but then there were folding-doors; and the front drawing-room was decorated and ornamented to such a pitch that one was quite afraid to sit down in any of the chairs. When I heard what the rent was, I was charmed with the rooms. Harry could not understand my enthusiasm. I found it the handiest place in the world;—and then it showed such discrimination in

the landlady to ask so moderate a rent. We fetched Lizzie and baby from the inn directly, and dismissed Harry to look at the town. And really, when we got a little settled, it was not so uncomfortable; though, to be sure, to give up the sizeable room for company (and they never came!), and to live in that little box behind was very foolish, as I always thought. However, when, I above and Lizzie below, we had investigated the house, and when the landlady was made to comprehend, with difficulty, that our washing was done at home, and that her toleration of these processes was needful, and when her wonder and the first shock to her system conveyed in this piece of intelligence was over, things looked tolerably promising. The worst was, we had no view; no view whatever except the bit of garden plot before the house, filled with dusty evergreens, and the corner of a street which led to the railway station. The cabs and people, going to and from the trains,

made the only variety in the prospect; and anybody will allow that was sadly different from windows which looked sidelong over the corner of Bruntsfield Links, upon the Castle, and the Crags, and Arthur's Seat. However, what I had to think of, in the meantime, was how to live without getting into debt; for, of course, people like us, with just so much money coming in (and oh, how very, very little it was!), had neither any excuse nor any way of saving themselves if once they ventured into debt.

Thus we got established in our new quarters; and many a long ramble I took with Harry along those strange superannuated wails.— To think how they once stood up desperate, in defence, round the brave little town! to think of the wild Welsh raging outside on that tranquil turf, where the races were now-a-days; to think of those secure streets down there, that lengthened themselves out presumptuously beyond the ramparts, and even cut passages

through them, once cowering in alarm below their shadow! The place quite captivated me; and then the streets themselves, the strange dark-covered pathways, steps up from the street, with the shops lurking in their shadow! like some of the German towns, Harry told me. Looking into them from the street, and seeing the stream of passengers coming and going, through the openings and heavy wooden beams of the railing; or looking out of one of those openings upon a kind of street-scenes and life that had nothing in the world to do with the strange old-world arcade, from which one looked out as from a balcony, was as good as reading a book about ancient times. It was not like my dear Edinburgh, to be sure, but it was very captivating; and Harry and I enjoyed exploring together. It was all new and fresh to us—and it was spring; and when you have nothing to trouble you much, it is delightful to see new places, and get new pic-

tures into your mind. Chester was quite as novel, and fresh, and captivating, though it was only in our own country, as that German Munich which Harry told me of — Harry had been a great traveller before he joined, while his father was so long ill — could have been.

Lizzie, however, was not nearly so much at her ease as I was. When she felt herself laughed at, and looked at, and misunderstood, Lizzie fell back into her chronic state of awkwardness. Her national pride was driven to enthusiasm by her contact with "thae English." Lizzie entertained a steady disbelief that the tongue in which she heard everybody speak — which was far enough from being a refined one, however, — was their native and natural speech. "They were a' speaking grand for a purpose o' their ain, to make folk believe they were lords and leddies," Lizzie said; and with a still higher pitch of indignation, "Mem, *you* aye understood me, though

you're an English leddy; and think o' the like o' them setting up no' to understand what *your* lass means when she's speaking! I dinna understand *them*, I'm sure,—no half a dozen words. To hear that clippit English, and the sharp tongues they have, deaves me. The very weans in the streets they've nae innocence in them. They're a' making a fashion of speaking as fine as you."

"Never mind, Lizzie; you'll soon get accustomed to them, and make friends," said I, with an attempt at consolation.

"Friends! I never had onybody belonging to me but my faither," said Lizzie, who understood relations to be signified by that word: "but I'm no heeding now; and I'll soon learn to nip the ends off the words like the rest o' them. There's a grand green for drying, that Mrs. Goldsworthy calls the back ga'den; and, if you'll no' be angry, I can do the ironing grand mysel'."

"You! but I dare not trust you, Lizzie,"

said I, shaking my head. "Mr. Langham would find it out—I mean he would find *me* out—if they were not quite so well done; and you don't consider what quantities of things you will have to do—to keep the drawing-room nice, and get tea and breakfast, and wash, and I don't know what; and yet always to be tidy, and keep baby all day long. You don't know what you have on your hands already, you unlucky girl."

"Eh, I'm glad!" cried Lizzie, clapping her hands together with fervour; and her brown eyes sparkled, and her uncouth figure grew steady with the delight of conscious energy and power. If she had been eighteen she would not have been so simple-minded. Never anybody was so fortunate as I had been in my little maid.

CHAPTER II.

Very soon we began to get interested in the people round about us; for we were not here, as we had been in Mrs. Saltoun's little house, the only strangers. By means of Lizzie, who was much annoyed at the discovery, I found out that the house was quite full of lodgers. On the ground floor there was a foreign gentleman and his servant. The gentleman was absent at first; but the man, a very fat, good-humoured-looking fellow, who adopted us all into his friendship immediately, and expanded into smiles through the railings of the stair when any of us went up or down, was in full possession. The way that Lizzie avoided this smiling

ogre, and the way in which he appreciated her panic, and was amused by it, and conciliated and coaxed her, was the most amusing thing I ever saw. And the way he opened the door for me, and took off his hat, and laid his hand on his heart and bowed! The good fellow quite kept us in amusement. When baby, who was getting on famously and noticing everything, crowed at him, in spite of his great beard, as children *will* do to men (it is very odd; but babies *do* take to strange men sooner than to strange women, I believe), the fat foreigner burst into great shouts of delighted laughter, and snapped his fat fingers, and made the funniest grimaces to please the child. None of us could speak a single word of his language; we did not even know at first what countryman he was; but we all got to have the most friendly, kind feeling for the stranger, — all except Lizzie, who stumbled up and flew downstairs in her anxiety to avoid his

eyes. One bad habit he certainly had; he smoked perpetually. He smoked cigars — shockingly bad ones, Harry said: he did not even put them down when he sprang out of his parlour to open the door for me; but only withdrew the one he was smoking from his full red lips, and held it somehow concealed in his hand. As he was constantly about in the house, or lingering close at hand with his great-coat buttoned on round his throat like a cloak, and the empty sleeves waving from his shoulders, stamping his feet on the ground, and whistling like a bird, this smell of bad cigars was perpetually about the house. Poor Mrs. Goldsworthy went up and down with the most grieved look upon her face. If any one made the least sign of having smelt anything disagreeable, she held up her hands in the most imploring way, and said, "What can a poor body do? He's the obligingest creatur as ever was! and he don't know a word of Christian language;

and the gentleman—which is a *real* gentleman, and none o' your make-believes—as good as left him in my charge; and, bless you, if he will smoke them cigars, and don't understand a word a body says to him, what am I to do?" Indeed, for my own part, I had not only a great sympathy for him, but I could not help liking the fat fellow; and after a few days it was astonishing how we got used to the cigars.

Then we ourselves occupied the two next floors. It was a strange little house; two rooms, back and front, piled on the top of each other four stories high; the top-story rooms were attics; and there was actually a lodger in each of those attics! Where Mrs. Goldsworthy and her daughter slept themselves was more than either Lizzie or I could make out. One of the attic lodgers was a thin, wistful man, whom I could not help looking at. He worked at something in his own room, and used to go out to dine. He was always very neat and clean;

but very threadbare, and with a hungry look that went to one's heart. Perhaps it was not want; maybe he was hungry for something else than mere money or nourishment; but sometimes I am sure I should not have been surprised to hear that he was starving too. Sometimes he looked at me or at baby in his wistful way, just as he vanished past us. I can't say he ever smiled, even, at little Harry; but still we drew his eyes when he chanced to meet us going out or in. I felt a great compassion for this poor solitary man. He was a man that might have been found starved, but never would have asked any charity: at least so I thought of him. I used to fancy him sitting in his solitary room upstairs by the window, and not by the fire, — for we never heard him poking any fire, and often saw him at the window, — and wondered how people could get so isolated, and chilled, and solitary; how they lived at all when they came to that condition—benumbed of all

comfort, and still not frozen to death. How strange to think of keeping on living, years and years after one's heart is dead! Harry said I was fanciful and continually made stories about people; but I did not tell Harry one half of my fancies; I don't know what he would have done to me if I had; but I did so wish I could have some chance of doing something to please that old man.

One day Harry came downstairs with a smile on his face. "There is the most ludicrous scene going on below; come and look, Milly," he said, drawing me to the stairs. I peeped down, and there, to be sure, I saw a reason for the sound of talking I had heard for a few minutes past. Lizzie was sitting on the stair, pondering deeply, with a perplexed face, over a large book spread out on the step above her. She was holding baby fast in one arm, and staving off his attempts to snatch at the leaves of the book. Leaning on the ban-

nisters regarding her, and holding forth most volubly in an unknown tongue, was our fat friend; and between every two or three words he pointed to the book, making a sort of appeal to it. The contrast between the two—she silent and bewildered, confused by her efforts to restrain baby and comprehend the book—he, the vast full figure of him, so voluble, so good-humoured, so complacent, talking with his fat arms and fingers, his gestures, and every movement he made—talking with such confidence that language which nobody understood—was almost as irresistible to me as to Harry. We stood looking down at them, extremely amused and wondering. Then Lizzie, failing to comprehend the book, and hearing herself addressed so energetically, raised her round eyes, round with amazement, to the speaker's face. The unknown tongue awed Lizzie; she contemplated him with speechless wonder and dismay; until at last, when the speaker made an evident

close appeal to her, with a natural oratory which she could not mistake, unintelligible as was its meaning, her amazement burst forth in words. "Eh, man, what *div* ye mean?" cried Lizzie, in the extremity of her puzzled wonder. It was the climax of the scene. Though I thrust Harry back into the room instantly, that his laughter might not be heard, and smothered my own as best I could, the sound caught Lizzie's watchful ears. In another moment she had reached the top of the stairs, breathless, with her charge in her arms. The puzzled look had not left Lizzie's eyes, but she was deeply abashed and ashamed of herself. Harry's laughter did not mend the matter, of course. She dropped baby into my arms, and twisted herself into all her old awkward contortions. I had to send her away and dismiss Harry into the other room. Poor Lizzie had never possessed sufficient courage to permit herself to be accosted by the dreadful foreigner before.

However, we were not less amused when we heard what Mrs. Goldsworthy would have called "the rights of it." Lizzie, with great resolution, determined to have herself exculpated, came to me with her statement as soon as she was quite assured that "the Captain" was out of the way.

"Eh! I came to think at last he was, maybe, a Hielander," said Lizzie, "though they're seldom that fat. And he laid down the book straight before me in the stair. I kent what kind of book it was. It was the book wi' a' kind o' words, and the meanings. But the meanings just were English, and the words were some other language. And I kind of guessed what he wanted, too. He wanted me to look in the book for the words he said, to tell me what he meant; but eh! how was I to ken where one word ended and another began? And he just hurried on and on; and the mair I listened, the mair I could not hear a single word, and looking at the book was just

nonsense; and Master baby, he would try his hand; and oh, Mem, if you're angry, I didna mean ony ill, and I'll never do it again."

"Nonsense, Lizzie! I am not angry; but couldn't you get on with the dictionary, and help the poor fellow? Were not you a very good scholar at school?"

"No very," said Lizzie, hanging her head in agonies of pleased but painful bashfulness, and unconsciously uttering her sentiments in language as puzzling to an English hearer as any uttered by our fat friend downstairs. "No very," said Lizzie, anxiously truthful, yet not unwilling to do herself due credit;—"no *very*, but gey."

Here I fear my laugh rather shocked and affronted Lizzie. She stood very upright, and twisted nothing but her fingers. It would have been as impossible to persuade her that there was scarcely a person in Chester, but myself, who could have translated that exquisite monosyllable as

to convince the foreigner that he was actually and positively incomprehensible in spite of the dictionary. But I will not attempt to interpret *gey;* it is untranslatable, as we are quite content so many French words should be. Even into Harry's head, which should be capable of better things, I find it quite impossible to convey an idea of the expressiveness of this word. Lizzie and I, however, knew no other to put in its place.

"But a *gey* good scholar might do a great deal for the poor fellow," said I, when I had got over my laughter; "tell him the English names for things. Try if you can find out his name; but I forgot you were frightened for him, Lizzie."

"Ay, till I thought he might, maybe, be a Hielander," said Lizzie. "Though the Hielanders dinna belang to us at hame, they might feel kindly in a strange place; and I've heard folk speaking Gaelic. But this is no like Gaelic, it's a' aws and os; and it's

awfu' fast, just a rattle; a' the words run in to one another. Forbye what harm could he do me? and the book was straight in my way on the stair; and it gangs to my heart to set my foot on a book. Ye might be trampin' ower a bit o' the Bible without kennin'; and then he's very good-natured; and then," said Lizzie, her eyes suddenly glowing up, "it would be grand to learn a language that nae ither body kens!"

With the greatest cordiality I applauded this crowning argument, and did all I could to encourage her to persevere with the dictionary, and make herself interpreter; for I was not wise enough to think that this new study might possibly be too captivating for Lizzie, and lead her into neglect of her many and pressing duties. I only thought it was the most amusing mode of intercourse I ever heard of, and that it would be great fun to watch its progress. Besides, as she said herself, what harm could he do her? Poor Lizzie, who

might have have been in danger at an elder age in such a comical friendship, was invulnerable to all the dangers of flirtation at fourteen.

CHAPTER III.

About this time Harry's object was attained, and some of the other ladies of the regiment called on me. I think they were a little surprised to find me just like other people, and not very much afraid of them; though I will confess that in my heart I was rather anxious, thinking whether Lizzie would have the discretion to put on baby's best frock, in case they asked to see him. They did ask, of course; and when, after a few minutes, Lizzie brought him down, not only with his best frock on, but with the ribbon I had just got to trim my bonnet for spring, carefully tied round his waist for a sash, anybody may imagine what my feelings

were! He looked very pretty in it certainly; but only fancy my good ribbon that I had grudged to buy, and could not do without! Ah! it is just possible that one's nursery-maid may be too anxious to show off one's baby to the best advantage. However, of course, I had to smile and make the best of it, and console myself with bursting forth upon Lizzie whenever they were gone.

"How could you think of taking my ribbon! oh Lizzie, Lizzie! and I am sure I cannot afford to buy another one," cried I.

"It's a' preened on," said Lizzie mysteriously," "there's no a single crumple in't; and I made the bows just like what the leddies have them on their bonnets, and it's no a bit the waur. But, Mem, the very weans in the streets have a sash round their waist; and was I gaun to let on to strangers that our bairn hadna everything grand? And he sat still like a king till I fastened it a' on. You see yoursel' it has taken nae harm."

"But the pins!" cried I, in horror. "Were you not afraid, you dreadful girl, to make a pincushion of my boy?"

Lizzie was fast taking them out, conveying them to her mouth in the first place, and furtively withdrawing them again lest I should observe her. Her only answer was to point triumphantly to the child.

"Would he laugh like that if I had jaggit him?" cried Lizzie. There was no contesting that proof; so I had to withdraw the ribbon out of their joint hands immediately, and put it at once to its proper use. This, however, was neither the first nor the last of Lizzie's impromptus. Those great red fingers of hers, all knuckles and corners as they were, had that light rapid touch which distinguishes every true *artiste*. She devised and appropriated for the decoration of baby and "the credit of the house," with the utmost boldness. It was not safe to leave anything which she could adapt to his use in her way.

The next trial I had was an invitation to dinner, which came for us shortly after. I set my face very much against it. Long ago, when Harry used to tell me about their parties, I made up my mind it never would do for us to begin going to them, however much we might be asked. To be sure Harry might go. I was always glad Harry should go; but how was I, who had got no trousseau, like other young wives, when I was married, but just had one cheap silk dress, bought off Aunt Connor's ten pounds, which I made up myself, to go out to dinner? I stood out long and obstinately; but I had to give in at last, just as I had about the maid and the lodgings. Harry would not go by himself. He would not decline the invitation; he said, with a very glum face, that we had better accept, and leave it to the chapter of accidents to find an excuse at the time. He did not understand how necessary it was for me to keep at home. He had been able always to

go where he wanted, and keep up with the rest, and it fretted him dreadfully now to feel the bondage that our narrow means put us in. You understand he did not object to be economical in a general way, nor even, indeed, grumbled, the dear good fellow, at giving up many of his old luxuries; and, at first, he seemed to be delighted with having no society but our own. But now, when he began to feel annoyed that his wife was not in the same position as the others, and when I plied him with all the old arguments—that we dare not begin such a life or the expense would ruin us, Harry became very restive indeed. Somehow it seemed to gall and humble him; the idea that *his* wife could not go out for want of a dress! He could not put up with the thought; he jumped up from his chair as if something had stung him. "It is nonsense, Milly! folly! the merest shortsightedness; you don't want half a dozen dresses to go to one dinner, and one dress can't ruin us," cried the un-

reasonable fellow. He would not understand me or listen to me. The notion wounded him quite to the heart. He looked so sulky and miserable that I could not bear to see it. I gave a great sigh, and gave in again. What could I do?

"Well, Harry!" said I, "the foolishness is all on the other side, mind; but if I must give in I can't help myself. I am only twenty, not twenty quite. I'll go in white."

"Bravo! you could not do better than go in white!" cried Harry, "there's a courageous woman! But why, may an ignoramus ask, should you not go in white, Milly darling? Isn't it the dress of all others for a—well, an ugly little creature like you?"

"I am not so sure about the ugly," said I; "and now, please, get your hat and come out with me. I saw the fashions in a window at the other end of the street. Let us go and look at them, and then I shall know how to make it up."

"Why can't you go to the milliner like other people," growled the unsatisfied man; "and why, answer my question, shouldn't you go in white?"

I durstn't confess that I had my own vanity in the matter, and being a matron, rather despised a white muslin frock to go out in; for if I had betrayed the least inkling of such a thing, there is no saying what he might not have done; run up a bill, or paid away all the money he had, or something; so I stopped his mouth with some foolish answer, and ran off to get my bonnet. Upstairs baby was sitting on the carpet, with Lizzie beside him, jumping a little pasteboard harlequin to please him. Her brown eyes were quite sparkling over the loose-legged, insane figure, as she jerked the string about. I could not help but stand and look at her for a moment with a startled sensation. She was just as much amused as baby was. Only to think of such a child being left in charge of our boy! I went

downstairs in consequence with a slower step, after having given Lizzie a superabundance of cautions about taking care of him. Only a girl of fourteen! I daresay all this time you must have been thinking I was mad to trust her; but, indeed, she was a very extraordinary girl; and after all, when you think it, fourteen is quite a trustworthy age. She was old enough to know what she ought to do, and not old enough to be distracted by thoughts of her own. Ah, depend upon it, fourteen is more single-minded than eighteen; and then Lizzie had a woman's strength and handiness along with her child's heart.

Not to delaylo nger about it, we did go to the party. Harry said I looked very well on the whole; he did not think he would have been disposed to exchange with anybody. I had no jewellery at all, which was rather a little humiliating to me; but, to my wonder and delight, Harry did not object to that. "They'll only think you're setting up for

simplicity," he said, laughing. "I suppose it's safer to be thought a little humbug than to have your dreadful destitution known. Come along. Nobody will suspect you have not a bracelet; only mind you behave yourself very innocently, like a little shepherdess, and you'll take everybody in."

I cannot say I very much admired this piece of advice; and if Harry had thought me the least likely to take it, I am sure he would not have been so ready with his good counsels. The party disappointed me a great deal. How is it one reads in books of society being so captivating, and intoxicating, and all that, and how, when one is used to it, one can't do without it? On the contrary, it was as dull—duller than anybody could imagine! Instead of that delightful stream of conversation always kept up, and so easy, and so witty, and so clever, you could see perfectly well that everybody was trying to contrive what they should say, and to find out things that would bear talk-

ing about. The poor lady of the house was so anxious to keep up the talk that she ate no dinner in the first place; and in the second, evidently frightened by the pauses that occurred, kept talking loud herself, and dancing on from one subject to another till she was quite breathless. Then there was one man who was expected to make you laugh — people prepared to laugh whenever he opened his lips; but I am sorry to say I was so indiscreet as only to stare at him, and wonder what it was about. I caught the eye of the young lady sitting by him as I did so. She was little,—less than me,—dark, and very, *very* pretty. She was only Miss somebody, but she was dressed more richly than anybody there, and had the most beautiful bracelets. I could not help feeling a little when I looked at my poor wrists and my white muslin dress — I who was married, and she only a young girl; when, just at that moment, she gave me a quick look, lifting up her eyebrows, and smiling

rather disdainfully at the great wit beside her. Immediately we two were put in communication somehow. I suppose it was mesmerism. Her eyes kept seeking mine all the time of dinner. The odd thing about her was that her hair was quite short, hanging in little curls upon her neck, like a child's; and of all things in the world, for such a child to wear, she was dressed in *violet velvet*, the most beautiful shade in the world. I suppose Harry would have said she was a little humbug too, and did it for effect; but, to be sure, it must have been wealth and not poverty that did it in her case. When we went up to the drawing-room after dinner, she very soon made her way to me. The other ladies, most of them belonging to the regiment, had come round me, and were doing their best to discover why I had been kept in the dark so long, and whether anything could be found out about me. I stood at bay pretty well, I think; but when Miss Cresswell came in, somehow

all at once, like a fresh little breeze, in her soft velvet dress, to the sofa beside me, I really felt I could have laid down my head on her shoulder and cried. To be sure it was very foolish; one can smile and keep up when one is being baited, but when one finds a real friend after being aggravated out of one's life, it is only natural to feel disposed to cry. I say a real friend, though I never saw her before,—it was mesmerism, I suppose; we took to each other at once.

We had got quite intimate before the gentlemen came upstairs. I had told her where we lived, and she had promised to come and see me, and we had found out a great many opinions we had in common. Things were different, however, when the gentlemen appeared. All the young men hovered about Miss Cresswell. There were few young ladies, and she was certainly much the prettiest; and, I am very grieved to have to say it—I cannot deny that she *did* flirt a little. She was disdainful, and would

take no notice of anybody at first, but by degrees she did come to little bursts of flirtation; and I am afraid she liked it too. Then there began to be things said about her and me which displeased me. We were "Art and Nature," somebody said; and some of the gentlemen evidently entertained the same feeling that Harry had indicated, when he said they would suppose me a little humbug. Evidently we were both thought little humbugs, sitting by each other to set each other off. Some of them, I do believe, thought it had been all made up beforehand. Certainly we were a strange contrast; I, in my plain white dress, with no ornaments; she in velvet, with such a quantity of jewellery. But to have people looking at me, and contrasting me with Miss Cresswell, and making jokes upon my dress and hers, was what I did not choose to put up with. People accustomed to society may like it, but I did not. So I got up and took Harry's arm, and went to look at a picture.

Nobody spoke to us for some five minutes or so, but we were close to some ladies talking with all their might. Then some one touched my arm, and I saw Miss Cresswell had followed me, and brought an old gentleman with her. This was her father. I got behind one of the talking ladies to veil my "simplicity," that there might be no more nonsense about it. The ladies were talking of women working. Oh, so little as they knew or pretended to know about it! I wonder what they would have thought if they could have seen my laundry operations; or, indeed, I wonder, under all that fine talk, whether they had not, of mornings, some work to do themselves. However, I only tell this for the glimpse it gave me of my new friend.

"It is all very well to speak of hardships," cried Miss Cresswell. "*I* can't see any hardship in doing one's work. Ah! don't you think they are very happy who *have* something to do?—something they must

do, whether they like it or not. I hate always doing things if I like! it is the most odious, tiresome stuff! If I like! and if I like it pray, what is the good of it? It is not work any longer, it is only pleasure."

"My dear child," said one of the old ladies, "be thankful you have so much ease and leisure. Your business just now is to please your papa."

Here the old gentleman burst in with a long slow laugh, "To worry him, you mean," said Mr. Cresswell; "tell her of her duty, Mrs. Scrivin. Ah, my dear lady, she's contrairy!" he cried, shaking his head with a certain air of complacence and ruefulness. Miss Cresswell gave him such a flashing, wicked look out of her dark eyes, and then seized my hand to lead me away somewhere. She was not a dutiful good girl, it appeared; she did not look like it. Now she was roused up, first by flirting, and then by rebellion and opposition, you could see it in her eyes. I am sorry, I am ashamed

to confess it — but I do believe I liked her the better for being so wicked. It is very dreadful to say such a thing, but I am afraid it was true.

CHAPTER IV.

Our fat Italian friend below stairs began to give us great amusement just then. Wherever he went he carried under his arm that square volume as fat as himself, in which Lizzie was at present pursuing her occult and bewildered studies. To see Domenico (for that was his name), coming to a sudden halt straight before you, blocking out all the light from that tiny passage, which Mrs. Goldsworthy called her "hall," and announcing, with a flourish of his dictionary, that he had something to communicate, was irresistibly comic certainly; but it was a little embarrassing as well. Dominico's verbs were innocent of either

past, present, or future. I presume he was quite above any considerations of grammar, except that supplied to him by nature, in his own language, and was not aware that such a master of the ceremonies existed to introduce him to the new tongue, which the poor fellow found so crabbed and unmanageable. I have heard of people managing to get on in foreign countries with a language composed of nouns and the infinitive of verbs (I honestly confess, that when I heard this story first, I had very vague ideas of what the infinitive of a verb was); a primitive savage language containing the possibilities of existence; eating, drinking, and sleeping; but quite above the conventional uses of conversation. Domenico's ambition was far higher, but his information was absolutely confined to those same infinitives. He knew the word only as it stood in the dictionary — what were tenses and numbers to him? But you will perceive that a conversation conducted on

these principles was necessarily wanting in precision, and that the conversing persons did not always understand each other with the clearness that might have been desired.

One clear spring morning, a few days after the party, I was going out about household affairs, when Domenico stopped me on the way to the door. He had his coat off, and the immense expanse of man in shirt-sleeves, which presented itself before me, cannot be expressed by description. As usual, he was smiling over all his face; as usual, his red lips and white teeth opened out of his beard with a primitive fulness and genial good-humour; as usual, he seized his beard with one hand as he addressed me, opening out his big dictionary on the table with the other. "Signora," cried Domenico, "the master my— me, of me," first pointing at himself, and then, to make assurance sure, boxing his chest emphatically, "the my master, — Signora understand? — come back."

"What?" I cried, "he has come back, has he, Domenico?"

Domenico nodded a hundred times with the fullest glee and rapture. "I — me — Domenico," he cried, again boxing himself, that there might be no doubt of his identity, "make prepare."

From which I divined that the master was not yet returned; and, nodding half as often as Domenico, by way of signifying my entire content and sympathy, foolishly concluded that I was let off and might pass. However, Domenico was not yet done with me.

"The Signora give little of the advice," said Dominico, with unusual clearness, opening the door of his parlour, and inviting me by many gestures to enter. I looked in, much puzzled, and found the room in all the agonies of change. The carpet had been lifted, and the floor polished, which, perhaps, explained the sounds we had heard for some days. I cannot de-

scribe how the mean planks of poor Mrs. Goldsworthy's little parlour, many of them gaping apart, looked under the painstaking labours of Domenico. He had contrived to rub them into due slipperiness and a degree of shine; but the result was profoundly dismal, and anything but corresponding to the face of complacency with which Domenico regarded his handiwork. The fat fellow watched my eyes, and was delighted at first with my astonishment; but, perceiving immediately, with all the quick observation which our straitened possibilities of speech made necessary, that my admiration was by no means equal to my surprise, his countenance fell. "He not pleases to the Signora," said Domenico. Then he hastened to the corner where the rejected carpet lay in a roll, and spread a corner of it over the floor. I nodded my head again and applauded. Domenico's disappointment was great.

"But for the sommere?" said Domenico with a melancholy interrogation.

"It is never so warm in England,—cold, cold," I said, with great emphasis and distinctness. Domenico heard and brightened up.

"Ah, thank! ah, thank! not me remember. England! ah! Inghilterra! no Italia! ah, thank! the Signora make good."

The Signora was permitted to consider herself dismissed, I concluded by the bows that followed, and I hastened to the door, outstripping, as I thought, the anxious politeness of the fat Italian. But I wronged his devotion: with that light step, which was so ludicrously out of proportion to his enormous figure, he swung out of the room to open the door for me, and accomplished it in spite of my precipitation, taking in his vast dimensions somehow so as to pass me without collision. I went about my business with all the greater lightness after this comical encounter, and a little curiosity, I confess, in respect to the master who was coming home. Harry had heard of him already,

as having quite a romantic story attached to him. He had come to Chester to see some lady whom he was quite confident of finding, and had been hunting all the neighbouring country for her without meeting anybody who knew even her name. It was supposed he had gone to make inquiries somewhere else, and now he was coming home. I got quite interested about it. I pictured him out to myself quite a romantic Italian, of course, with long hair, and a picturesque cloak, and possibly a guitar. I made up a story in my own mind, like that story of the Eastern girl and A'Becket — that prettiest story! I could fancy Domenico's master, not knowing much more English, perhaps, than Domenico, wandering about everywhere with *the name* on his lips; for, of course, it must be a love-story. It is impossible to imagine it could be anything else.

In the evening, when Harry and I were going out for a little walk, Domenico sud-

denly presented himself again, and stopped us. This time he was beaming broader than ever with smiles and innocent complacent self-content. He invited us into the parlour with a multitude of bows. Harry, who had heard the morning's adventure, went immediately, and I followed him. The room was all in the most perfect tidiness; Mrs. Goldsworthy's hideous ornaments were put in corners, ornaments of any kind being apparently better than none in Domenico's eyes. But the mantelpiece, where the little flower-glasses had heretofore held sole sway, was now occupied by some plaster figures bought from a wandering image-merchant, whom Domenico had loudly fraternised and chattered with at the door some days before. In the middle was a bust of Dante, upon which the Italian had placed a wreath of green leaves. The walls were covered with cheap-coloured prints in frames — I suspect of Domenico's own manufacture; such prints

as people fasten up, all frameless in their simplicity, upon walls of nurseries: gay, bright, cheap, highly-coloured articles, which quite satisfied the taste of Domenico, himself a child in everything but size and years. It was nothing to his simple mind that they had no money value, and I suppose no value in art either. I don't suppose Domenico knew anything about art, though he was an Italian. But he knew about decoration! He had made the walls blush and smile to welcome the new-comer. I trust his master was no artist either, and could appreciate the adornments which made the face of Domenico beam. The good fellow was so pleased that he forgot his dictionary; he burst forth into long explanations, interspersed by bursts of laughter and gestures of delight, in his own tongue. He threw open the door of the little room behind to reveal to us the arrangements of his master's bedchamber. He explained to Harry—at least I have no doubt, by the way

he pointed to the carpet, and the frequency of the word Signora, that this was what he meant — all about the carpet and his polished floor. At last it suddenly flashed upon Domenico that he was spending his eloquence in vain. He rushed to the table where his beloved dictionary reposed; he dashed at its pages in frantic haste, with wild pantomimic entreaties to us to wait. "Is good? good?" said Domenico, with an eager expressiveness which made up for his defective verbs. I applauded with all the might of gestures and smiles; upon which our friend once more opened the door for us. "To-morrow! after to-morrow!" said the good fellow. It was then his master was coming home.

And, I am sorry to say, Harry was rather disposed to laugh at the fat Italian, and to be sarcastic upon his beautiful prints. Harry did not know anything in the world about pictures; but he knew how cheap these were, and that was enough for him,

the prose Englishman. I am thankful to say that I soon reduced him to silence. He declared I was savage in good Domenico's defence.

CHAPTER V.

"MEM, he's been at the market," said Lizzie, next morning, "and bought a hen; and he smiles and laughs to himself like to bring down the house."

This was the first bulletin of the important day on which the Italian gentleman was expected home.

The next report was more painful to Lizzie's feelings. "He's been at the chapel," said Lizzie, in a horrified whisper, "and brought hame water to put in the wee bowlie at the maister's bedhead. Oh, did you see it? it has a cross, and — and — a figure on't," said Lizzie, with deep awe, "and a

wee round bowlie for the water. What'll yon be for? I'm no sure it's safe to be in the same house."

Lizzie's horror, however, did not diminish her curiosity. After a little interval another scrap of information reached my attentive ear. "He has some veal on the kitchen-table," said Lizzie, "and if he's no' working at it himsel'! A man! cutting away and paring away, and putting the pan a' ready like a woman—and, eh, mem, the wastry's dreadful. He's making holes in't and stuffin' them fu' o' something! Noo he's puttin't on the fire."

That day baby was neglected for the first time. Lizzie was too much excited and interested—not to say that she had an observant eye, and believed it quite possible that she might receive a hint from this man of all work—to repress her natural curiosity. The next thing she reported was a half-alarmed statement that "he was away out again and left it at the fire; and

what if it was *sitting to** before he came hame?" Lizzie's dread of this accident carried her off downstairs to watch Domenico's stew with friendly anxiety. In about an hour she re-appeared again.

"He's come back; and, eh! o' a' the things in the world to think upon, it's a box of thae nasty things he smokes!" cried Lizzie. "If the gentleman smokes tae, we'll a' be driven out of the house."

Just then, however, another incident occurred which interrupted Lizzie's observations. As she went out of the room, in silent despair, after her last alarming presentiment, somebody evidently encountered her coming up. "I want Mrs. Langham, please," cried Miss Cresswell's voice. "Are you her maid? Oh, I'm not to be shown into the drawing-room. I am to go to *her*. Where is she?—in the nursery? Show me where to go, please."

* A Scotch expression, which signifies burned in the pan.

"But you *maun* go to the drawing-room," said Lizzie, making, as I felt sure from the little quiver in her voice, her bob to the young lady, and audibly opening the sacred door of our state apartment.

"Maun? do you mean must? I never do anything I must," said Miss Cresswell. "There now! make haste; show me where Mrs. Langham is."

"The drawing-room is the place for leddies that come visiting," said Lizzie, resolutely. "I'll no let ye in ony other place."

"You'll not let me in!—what do you mean, you impertinent child?" cried Miss Cresswell.

"I'm no a child," said Lizzie. "I ken my duty; and if I was to lose my good place what good would that do onybody? If ye please, ye'll come in here."

The pause of astonishment that followed was evident by the silence; then a little quick impatient step actually passed into

that poor little drawing-room. "You strange little soul! but I'll tell Mrs. Langham," cried Miss Cresswell.

"I'm no a soul," said Lizzie; "I'm just like other folk. I'm Mrs. Langham's lass; and she kens me different from a stranger. What name will I say, if ye please?"

This question was answered by a burst of laughter from the visitor, which I increased by throwing open the door of my concealment and disclosing myself with baby in my arms. *He had on his best frock by accident*, which explains my rashness.

"How have you managed it?" cried Miss Cresswell; "why, here is a romance-servant. Dear Mrs. Langham, tell me what you have done to her to make her so original — and let me have baby. I have not come to make a call, as that creature supposed. I have come as a friend — you said I might. Why must I be brought into this room?"

"It is the most cheerful room," said I, evading the question: "however, Lizzie did

not mean to be saucy — she knew no better — but she is the most famous help in the world, though she is little more than a child."

"But then I suppose you must do a great many things yourself?" said my visitor, looking me very close in the face.

I felt my cheeks grow hot in spite of myself, — if Harry had heard her he would have been furious; and I daresay many people would have set this down at once as the impertinence of the rich to the poor. I felt it was no such thing; but still it embarrassed me a little, against my will.

"Do you know some people would be affronted to be asked as much?" said I.

"I know," cried Miss Cresswell, with a little toss of her head,—"people who can't understand how miserable it is not to *have* to do anything. Do you believe in voluntary work? I don't. I can't see it's any good. I can't see the use of it. I should like to cook the dinner and keep the things

tidy. I should like to see everything stand gaping and calling for me till I set it to rights. That's the pleasure; but as for saving somebody else trouble, why should I do it? I can't see any advantage whatever in that."

"Then you would not have me save Lizzie or the landlady some trouble when I can?" said I.

"That is totally a different thing," said the impetuous little girl; then she started, in a manner to me inexplicable, and gazed out of the window near which she was sitting. "Mr. Luigi!" she exclaimed to herself; "now I should so like to know what he wants here."

Just then there was the noise of an arrival at the door; of course it must be the Italian gentleman. "Who is he?" said I. "If it is the Italian, he lives here."

Without making any immediate reply, Miss Cresswell clasped her hands softly together. "How strange!" she exclaimed.

Of course it was her own thoughts she was following out, but they seemed sufficiently interesting to rouse my attention. I occupied myself in the meantime with baby, feeling that it would be the merest cruelty to call upon Lizzie at this climax of the day's excitement. And Miss Cresswell leant forward, carefully drawing out the curtain of the window to shade her, and watching the return of Domenico's master. Her colour was a little higher than it had been previously, and she seemed to have quite quietly and comfortably forgotten my presence. I was amused; and, if I must confess it, I was in a condition to be easily affronted as well. At last she recovered herself, and blushed violently.

"I don't know what you will think of me," she cried; "but it *is* so strange — my godmamma had the last news of his going, and I have the first intelligence of his return. Do you know, there is quite a story about him. He has come here to

seek out a lady whom nobody ever heard of; but I do believe, whatever any one may choose to say, that godmamma Sarah knows."

"Knows? Will she not tell, then?" said I.

"Look here," said Miss Cresswell; "she was once a great beauty; and I believe, if you never will tell anybody, that she's a cruel, wicked old woman. There! I did not mean to say half so much. She got so agitated whenever she heard what Mr. Luigi wanted that nobody could help finding her out; but, though I am certain she knows, she will do everything in the world rather than tell."

"But why?"

"Oh, I cannot tell you why. I know nothing at all about it; and remember," cried my imprudent visitor, "that I tell you all this in the greatest secret! I would not tell papa nor any one. I said it to my own godmamma just as it came into my

head, and put her into such distress, the dear old soul! My own idea is, that godmamma Sarah does it only for spite; but her sister, you know, has a different opinion, and is frightened, and does not know what she is frightened about. I daresay you will think me very strange to say so," said Miss Cresswell, again blushing very much, "but I should like to meet Mr. Luigi. I am sure he is somehow connected with my godmothers: I cannot make out how, I am sure; but I am quite certain, however unlikely it may be, that godmamma Sarah knows!"

She seemed quite excited and in earnest about it; so, as all her thoughts were turned that way, I told her our amusing intercourse with Domenico, and what good friends we were. Though she laughed and clapped her hands, she was too much engrossed with her own thoughts evidently to be much amused. She was most anxious to

know whether I had heard anything of Mr. Luigi; whether the landlady talked of him; whether I knew how he came to Chester. She told me the story I had heard dimly from Harry in the most clear and distinct manner. On the whole, she filled me with suspicions. If I had not seen her flirting so lately, I should certainly have fancied her in love.

"You know him, then?" said I, after hearing her very steadily to an end.

"Not in the least," she cried, once more blushing in the most violent, undisguisable way. "How should I know him? Don't you know I have no brothers or sisters, Mrs. Langham? and can't you suppose that papa has exactly the same people to dinner year after year? Ah, you are quite different! You have your own place, and can choose your own society — choose me, please, there's a darling! My name's Sara; quite a waiting-maid's name; let me have baby

and come and help you. As for saying he would not come to me, it is nonsense. I will tell you exactly how many friends I have,—Godmamma, who is more than a friend, of course, but no relation; my old nurse, whom I *never* see, and who lives a hundred miles off; and old Miss Fielding, at the rectory. Now only think how much I am alone! You are quite new here; you can choose for yourself — choose me!"

"With all my heart!" said I. I was so much surprised by her ignorance and her free speech, that, though I liked her very much, I really did not know what more to say.

"I suppose, then, I may take off my bonnet?" she said, quite innocently looking up in my face.

If she had rushed to kiss me I could have understood it. If she had declared we were to be friends for ever, I should have quite gone in with her; but, to take off her

bonnet! that was quite a different matter. I am sadly afraid I stammered and stared. I wanted a friend as much as she did—but men are such strange creatures. What would Harry say when he came in?

However, Sara Cresswell did not wait till I finished considering. In five minutes after she was sitting on the carpet at the window with little Harry, playing with him. The child was quite delighted. As for me, I was too much taken by surprise to know whether I was pleased or not. Harry was to dine at mess that night; and, of course, I had only meant to have tea all by myself in the little back room. What was to be done? I am sorry to say I was very much tempted to improvise a dinner, and pretend that it was just what I always did. I think the thing that saved me from this was looking at her with her little short curls; she looked so like a child! Besides, if we were really to be friends, was I to begin by deceiving

her? Much better she should know at once all our simple ways.

"You will have no dinner," said I, faltering a little. "Mr. Langham goes out, and I only take tea."

"That is exactly what I like. Dinners are *such* bores!" said Sara, with the air of one who belonged to us and had taken possession.

It was getting quite dark, and the lamps were being lighted outside; of course it delighted baby very much to be held up to see them, as his new nurse held him. As she stood there lifting him up, I put my hand upon her pretty hair. She had quite taken my heart.

"Have you had a fever, dear?" said I.

Sara stared at me a moment, then looked deeply affronted, then burst into a strange laugh. "I forgive you, because you called me dear," she cried, starting off with baby to the other window. I suppose, then, it

had not been a fever, — some foolish fancy or other, — and no doubt her friends and acquaintance had pretty well avenged it, without any further question from me.

CHAPTER VI.

Next morning I was a little amused and a little surprised to think over all that had happened. The idea of having a friend, who stayed with me till after nine, and helped to put baby to bed, and interfered with Lizzie, and turned over all our few books, and asked all sorts of questions, was the oddest thing in the world to me; and of course when I told Harry I heard all sorts of jokes from him about female friendship, and inquiries how long it would last, which made me extremely angry. Are men's friendships any steadier, I wonder? I should say *male* friendship, to be even with him. Mr. Thackeray is delightful; but

he puts a great deal of stuff into young men's heads. I allow *he* may joke if he likes—to be sure, he does not mean half of it—but do you suppose *they* may all follow his example? Not that I mean to infer anything on Harry's part that I could not pay him back quite comfortably. But not meaning Harry in the least, I don't see why I should not do my little bit of criticism. I was just beginning to read books at that time, and everything was fresh to me. All the foolish lads think they are quite as wise as Mr. Thackeray, and have quite as good a right to think themselves behind the scenes. I suppose there never was anybody who did not like to feel superior and wiser than his neighbours. I would put Domenico's laurel wreath on Mr. Thackeray's head; but I should like to put an extinguisher on the heads of the Thackerians. I should think the great man would be disposed to knock down half the people that quote him, could he only hear, and behold, and note.

However, that has nothing to do with my story. I knew Lizzie must be in a highly excited state from long repression of her manifold gleanings of intelligence respecting last night's arrival; and I went to her as soon as Harry was out lest any explosion should happen. Lizzie, however, looked rather downcast as, baby being asleep, she went about her work upstairs. My first idea was that some jealousy of Miss Cresswell had invaded the girl's mind, but that did not explain all the peculiarities of her manner. She certainly allowed herself to be drawn into an account of Domenico's proceedings, which gradually inspired and animated her; but even in the midst of this she would make a hurried pause, now and then, and listen, as if some painful sound had reached her ear.

"It was a very grand dinner. Eh, I never saw onything like the way he steered, and twisted, and mixed, and watched," said Lizzie; "he maun be a real man-cook, like

what's in books; and took up everything separate, six different things one after the ither; and Sally says there was as mony plates as if it had been a great party; and the minute before and the minute after, what was the gentleman doing but smoking like as if he was on fire; and eh, mem, he maun be a great man yon! Domenico kissed his hand; but after that," continued Lizzie, blushing and turning aside with a strong sense of impropriety, "the gentleman kissed *him!*"

"That is how foreigners do," said I, in apology.

"And after the dinner there was that sound o' their tongues through the house, you would have thought the walls would ha'e been down. Eh, sic language for Christians to speak! but, mem, they're no Christians, they're Papishers — is that true?" said Lizzie, with a little anxiety. "Such a blatter o' words, and no one a body could understand. No' that I was

wantin' to understand; but it's awfu' funny to hear folk speakin', and nae sense in't. Eh, whisht! what was that?" cried Lizzie, starting and stopping short in her tale.

It certainly was, or sounded, very like a moan of pain.

"What is it, Lizzie?"

"Eh, to think of us speaking of dinners, and sic nonsense!—and, mem, it's a poor man like to dee with pride, and sickness, and starvation! What will I do? What will I do?" cried Lizzie. "If naebody else in the house durst, it maun be me. I'll no keep quiet ony langer—he canna be ill at me that was destitute mysel'. I'll gang and steal the bairn's beef-tea, and tell him lies, that it's his ain. Mem, let me gang. I canna bear't ony mair!"

I stopped her, however, growing very much excited myself. "What is it? What do you mean?"

Lizzie, who was choking with distress, eagerness, and excitement, pointed her fin-

ger up, and struggled to find her voice. It burst upon me in a moment. The poor gentleman in the attic, the threadbare wistful man who went out to dine, had not been visible for some days. Lizzie told me in gasps what the landlady had told her. He was ill; he was very poor; deeply in Mrs. Goldsworthy's debt. They had noticed that his usual work had not been on his table for some time, and that no domestic stores of any kind were in his little cupboard; three days ago he had become too ill to go out; they did not think he had anything to eat, and he would accept nothing from them. All yesterday they had not ventured to enter his room. Sick, starving, friendless — what a picture it was! No wonder he had hungry, wistful eyes. I lost no time as you may suppose. I sent Lizzie flying downstairs for the beef-tea. As for asking whether he would admit me or not, whether he would think it impertinent or not, I never stopped to

think. Another of those moans, more audible this time because I was listening for it, thrilled me through and through before Lizzie came back. Bless the girl! in no time at all she had got the whitest napkin to be had in the house for the tray; and the beef-tea smoked and smelt just as it ought. I was at the door of the room before I thought anything about how I was to excuse myself. By mere instinct I opened the door first; then knocked, merely to warn the inmate of my coming, and in another moment stood all by myself in a new world.

Another world! a world of misery, endurance, voiceless passion, and persistence, altogether unknown to me. He was lying on some chairs before the fireplace, supporting his gaunt shoulders against the end of his bed,—before the fireplace, in which there was no fire, nor had been. It was trim and well-blacked, and filled up with faded ornamental chippings of paper. His

table was beside him, and he leaned one arm on it; nothing on the table, not even a book, except some old pens, blotting-paper, and an ink-bottle. His coat buttoned close up to his neck, with dreadful suggestive secrecy, plainly telling how little there was below; and the hungry sad eyes, glaring wolfish and frenzied out of his worn face. He gave a great start when I came in, and either in passion or weakness thrust one of the chairs from under his feet, so that it fell with a great noise on the floor. The sound and the movement made my heart beat. But he took no further notice, only stared at me. I went forward and put the tray before him on the table, uncovered the basin, placed everything within his reach. All the while he stared at me, his eyes contracting and dilating as I never saw the eyes of any human creature before. I scarcely think he was a human creature at that moment; at least he was holding to his manhood only by that frantic hold of

pride, which hunger and misery were rending before my very eyes. He began to tremble dreadfully; the sight of the food excited his weakness; but he tried to resist till the last gasp.

"Who are you? and how dare you come to my room and intrude upon me!" he said hoarsely, and trembling like a palsied man.

"I am your fellow-lodger. You used to notice my baby when you went downstairs; and they told me you were ill, and could not go out. When one is ill there is nothing so good as beef-tea," said I, trembling a good deal myself; "even if you cannot eat, you might drink a little, and it would refresh you. Do pray try, it will do you good."

"And how do you know?" he said, trembling more and more, till his very utterance was indistinct, "that I cannot have beef-tea or—or anything else I like, of my own. Ah!" he ended, with a sharp cry. He put forward his hand towards it; then he

stopped in a dreadful spasm of resistance, and glared at me. I obeyed my first impulse, and went out of the room hurriedly. He would not take it while I was there.

In about five minutes after I went back again with some coals and wood, in one of Mrs. Goldsworthy's old coal-scuttles. I thought I saw how to manage him—never to ask permission or make apologies, but simply to do what was needful. He had emptied the basin, I saw at a glance, and had a piece of bread in his hand, which he put down when I came in. He said nothing, but stared at me as I lighted the fire. When my back was turned to him I fancied he made another stealthy application to the bread. He would hide the full amount of his misery if it were possible; but it was only a partial victory he could obtain over himself.

"Who, who are you?" he said at last. "You — you are a lady, eh? It is not your business to make up fires?"

"Yes," said I, as cheerfully as I could; "but we are poor; and when one has not much money one has many things to do."

At this the poor gentleman gave a great groan. Then, after a little, gasped, in broken words, "Thank God! creatures like you don't know the truths they say."

I understood him at once. "No," said I, "it is quite true; but God knows all about it, that is a comfort always. Don't you think if I put the pillows behind you you would be more comfortable? Try this. I am quite sure it is better so."

"Ah! but how do you know I can't have pillows as I please, and whatever I want of my own?" cried the jealous, delirious pride, waking up again in his big hollow eyes.

"I don't know anything about it," said I; "but you have nobody with you just now. If you will not send for any friends, you can't help having neighbours all the same."

He said, "Ah!" again, and relapsed into his silent stare. But for the frenzy of desperate want and desperate pride, which only flickered up by moments, he was too far benumbed with want and suffering to do anything in the way of resistance. After I had settled him a little comfortable I went downstairs again, and as soon as baby's second bowl of beef-tea, which had been hastily made to take the place of the first, was ready, I stole that also, and went up with it again. Baby, who was as fat as possible, could quite well do without it; and I remember having read that people, who had been in great want, should get food very often but not much at a time. The poor gentleman was lying with his head on the pillow and his eyes half shut, the light of the fire glimmering over him, and a kind of quiet in his attitude. When he opened his eyes they grew wolfish again for a moment; but he was subdued—the first frenzy was gone. Somehow he did

not seem alone any longer, with that dear good charitable fire blazing and crackling, and making all the noise it could, as if to show what company it could be. And this time he actually drew the basin towards him, and ate its contents before me. I went to the little window and cried a little privately. Oh, it was pitiful! pitiful! That morning I am sure he had laid himself down upon these chairs, mad with want, bitterness, and solitude, to die.

CHAPTER VII.

"You, who would not go out to dinner because you could not afford it!" cried Harry, "how do you dare venture on such rash proceedings? It appears to me you have adopted a new member into the family."

"Ah, but it is different," said I; "going out to dinner was a matter of choice, this was a matter of necessity."

"It depends upon how people think," said Harry, "the priest and the Levite were of quite a different opinion; but if you mean to have friends and pensioners, and get rich people and poor people about you, Milly darling, we'll have to think of new supplies. I cannot imagine how it has

gone out of my mind all this time. Pendleton actually asked me to-day whether I had heard anything more about your grandfather's house."

"My grandfather's house!" I said; and we both looked at each other and laughed; our removal had put all that out of our heads. Chester, and new places to look at, and new people to see, and just the usual disturbance of one's thoughts in changing about, had betrayed Harry who was so anxious about it, just as much as it had betrayed me.

"I must see after it now in earnest. A thousand pounds or so, you know," said Harry, with a kind of serio-comic look, "would be worth a great deal to you just now."

And with this he went out. A thousand pounds or so! twenty would have been nice; ay, or ten, or even five, more than just our regular money. However, I only laughed to myself, and went upstairs to my poor gen-

tleman. After all, I am not so sure that he was a gentleman, or at least that he was anything unusual in himself. He was very independent, and want, and a passionate dread of being found out, and made a pauper of, had carried him to a kind of heroism for the moment. But when he got used to me, and consented to let me bring him things, he became very much like other people. He was always eager to get the newspaper and see the news. I carried him up the Chester paper, which Mrs. Goldsworthy took in just now.

When I went into his room, the first thing I saw was two letters on the table. He was just drawing back, and still trembling from his exertion, for he was still very weak. He put the letters towards me with a little movement of his hand.

"I am writing to ask for work; I'm wonderfully steady now, wonderfully steady; if they would only give me work! Ah, it's

hard times when a man can't get work," he said.

I glanced at them as he wished me. "Cresswell?" said I; "I think I know his daughter, Mr. Ward. I'll speak to her; perhaps she can make him help you."

"She can make him do whatever she likes," said my friend, with his wistful eyes; "it'll be well for him if she don't make him do what he'll repent."

"How do you mean?" said I, with some surprise.

"Well!" said my patient, "it's a story I don't understand, and I can't give you the rights of it. I was never more than just about the office an hour or so in the day, getting my copy. You see there's two rich old ladies about half-a-dozen miles out o' Chester, and there's either some flaw in their title, or something that way. I know for certain there was an advertisement written out for the *Times*, for one Mortimer—"

"Mortimer!"

"Yes," he said, looking at me in his eager way. "I suppose it had been some day when he had quarrelled with them, and meant to bring in the true owner; when all of a sudden it was withdrawn, and has never been in the *Times* to this day; and Miss Cresswell after that spent a long time at the Park. Somebody said in the office it was more than likely the ladies would leave their property to her; and to be sure if that was so, it would be none of her father's business to hunt up the right heir."

I felt completely dizzy and bewildered; I kept looking down upon the table, where the letters seemed to be flitting about with the strangest unsteady motion. "And are the ladies called Mortimer?" I said, almost under my breath.

"Yes; they're folks well known in Chester, though seldom to be seen here," said Mr. Ward; "the youngest one, Miss Milly, is a good creature; the other one,

and her name is Sarah, was a great beauty in her day. I remember when I was a lad, we young fellows would walk all that way just to see her riding out of the gates, or driving her grey ponies; they called her the beautiful Miss Mortimer in those days. I daresay now she's as old, and as crazy, and as chilly—but, thank heaven, she can never be as poor, and as friendless, and as suffering —as me."

I could not make any answer for a long time. I stood with my hands clasped together, and my brain in a perfect whirl; these words, Sarah, Miss Mortimer, the Park, going in gusts through my mind. What did it mean? I had come upstairs with a smile on my lips about the fabulous house of my grandfather. Was this the real story now about to disclose itself? I felt for a moment that overwhelming impatience to hear more which makes one giddy when on the verge of a discovery; but I did not want to betray myself to the old man.

"And do you mean," said I, holding fast by the table to keep myself from trembling, "that they are not the lawful owners of their estate?"

"Nay, I cannot tell you that," said my patient, very coolly; "but what could be wanted with an advertisement in the *Times* for one Mortimer? and old Cresswell holding it back, you know, as soon as it was likely that his girl might get the Park."

"Do you remember what was the Mortimer's name that was to be advertised for? I know some Mortimers," said I, with a little tremble in my voice.

"I can't say I exactly remember just at this moment," said the old man, after a little pause. "It wasn't like a Mortimer name; it was — nay, stay, — it was one of the cotton-spinners' names; I remember I thought of the spinning-jenny directly; something in that way; I can't tell exactly what it was."

I could scarcely stand. I could scarcely keep silent; and yet I durst not, for something that choked the voice in my throat, suggest my father's name boldly to his recollection. I hurried away and threw myself on a chair in my own room. All was silent there; but with just a door between us Lizzie was playing with my boy; and his crows of infant delight, and her soft but homely voice, seemed to break in upon the solitude I wanted. I rose from that retreat, and went down to our little drawing room. There it was Domenico's voice, round and full, singing, whistling, talking, all in a breath. Nowhere could I get quiet enough to think over the extraordinary information I had just received. Or, rather, indeed it was not either Lizzie's voice, or Domenico's, but the agitation and tumult in my own mind; the beating of my heart, and the stir and restlessness that rose in me, that prevented me from thinking. Could it be possible that my father's languid pro-

phecy, which Aunt Connor reported so lightly, had truth in it after all? The idea excited me beyond the power of thinking. I went out and came in. I took up various kinds of work and threw them down again; I could do nothing till Harry came in, and I had told him. Then I fancied there might possibly seem some sense and coherence in the news. If this were to come true, then what prospects might be dawning upon us! In this sudden illumination my past dread returned to me, as a fear which has been forgotten for a time always does. The war! if Harry's wife turned out a great heiress, must not Harry himself cease to be a soldier and enter into his fortune? Ah me! but he would not; he would not if I should ask him on my knees; not, at least, till he had taken his chance of getting killed like all the rest. This threw me back, with scarcely a moment's interval, into the full tide of those thoughts which had tortured me before we came to Chester. I got up from

my chair and began to walk about the room in the restlessness of great sudden apprehension and terror. All my trouble came back. My fears had but been asleep, the real circumstances were unchanged; even to-day, this very day, Harry might be ordered to the war.

He saw my nervous, troubled look in a moment when he came in; he was struck by it at once. "You look as you once looked in Edinburgh, Milly," he said, coming up to me; "what is the matter? Something has happened while I have been away?"

"Harry," cried I, with a little excitement, suddenly remembering that I had news to tell him. "I have found the Park and the Sarah; I have found the estate I'm heiress to; I have found out something far more important than that old red-brick house; and, do you know, hearing of this brought everything to my mind directly, all my terrors and troubles. Never mind,

I'll tell you what I heard in the first place. It was from my poor gentleman upstairs."

Harry, who had heard me with great interest up to this point, suddenly shrugged up his shoulders, and put his lips together for that disdainful provoking whew! with which men always think they can put one down.

"Oh, indeed, you need not be scornful!" said I; "he writes papers for a lawyer, and had a very good way of knowing. He says Mr. Cresswell had an advertisement all ready to be put into the *Times* some months ago, for one Mortimer, whose name reminded him of a spinning-jenny. But it never was sent to the paper, because Miss Cresswell went out to the Park, and it was thought the ladies would make her their heiress; but it was supposed there was some flaw in their title, and that this Mortimer would be the true heir."

"The Park, and the ladies, and Miss Cresswell, and it was supposed? By Jove,

Milly ! " cried Harry, with great vehemence, " do you see how important this is ?—have you no better grounds than it was thought, and ; it was supposed ? "

" You are unreasonable, Harry ; I only heard what he had to say ; and, besides, it might not be my father, nor the same people at all. *He* could not tell me, I only heard what he had to say."

But this explanation did not satisfy Harry ; he became as excited as I had been, but in a different way. He snatched up his hat, and would have gone at once, on the impulse of the moment, to see Mr. Cresswell, had not I detained him. The news had the same influence on Harry that it had upon me. It woke us both out of the happy quiescence into which we had fallen when we came here. We were no longer dwelling at peace, safe in each other's society ; once more we were thrown into all the agitation that belonged to our condition and prospects. Harry was a soldier,

ready to be sent off any day to the camp and the trenches, gravely anxious about a home and shelter for his wife and child; I, a soldier's wife, ready at any moment to have the light of my eyes torn from me, and my life cut in twain. After the first hurried burst of consultation, we were both silent, thinking on these things. Certainly it was better that we should have been aroused. The reality coming at once, all unapprehended and unthought of, would otherwise have been an intolerable blow. Now there was little fear that we could forget again.

It was natural that we should return to the subject again and again during this day. Harry drew my father's old books, and the drawing he had laughed at, from his own desk, where he had kept them; and with them the envelope, full of formal documents, which he had written to Aunt Connor for with so much haste and importance, to substantiate my claim to my

grandfather's house; there they lay, unused, almost unlooked at. Harry shook his head as he drew them out. We neither of us said anything. We were neither of us sorry that we had forgotten all about it for a time. For my own part, I went away upstairs very like to cry. This information, which had thrown us back into so many troubles, might never come to anything; and even if it did, what difference would that make? Harry, if I was found out to be a king's daughter, would never leave his profession, or shrink from its dangers, while this war lasted. My pleasant forgetfulness was over now. He was looking at this subject in the light he had looked at it before we left Edinburgh;—it would be a home for me.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was an agitated, troubled day. The accidental nature of the information, calmly told to one who was supposed to have no interest in it; the coincidence of the names; the startled feeling we had in thus being suddenly brought into contact with people nearly connected with us, who were unaware of our existence, and of whose existence we had been unaware, acted very powerfully on our imaginations. I don't think either Harry or I had a moment's doubt upon the subject. As to the identity of the persons, certainly none; and I confess that I, for one, received with perfect faith the suggestion that there was a wrong somehow in the

matter, and that my father had turned out to be the true heir. It never occurred to me to imagine any other reason for the suppressed advertisement; and Mr. Cresswell, whom I had thought at the very climax of respectability, suddenly descended into a romantic lawyer-villain in my excited eyes.

To add to the agitation of my thoughts, Sara Cresswell chose to take that day for one of her odd visits. She came in the afternoon to stay with me till evening. She was clearly quite beyond her father's control; not even subject to a wholesome restriction of hours and meal-times; for she never said her father was out to dinner on the occasions of her coming, nor accounted in any way for her liberty at his dinner-hour. The little brougham used to come for her at night, with her little maid in it —a sign, I suppose, that the father did not disapprove; but that was all. Only wilful and lawless as she was, I confess I had grown to like her very much. I sometimes

lectured her; and once or twice we quarrelled; but she always came back next time just the same as ever. So quarrelling with her was evidently useless. I must say I had a very strange sensation in welcoming her to-day. Could she know her father's base purposes about that Park which, according to all appearances, ought to be mine? Could she have been paying her court to those ladies with the hope of supplanting the true heir? A glance at her face, only too frank and daring always, might have undeceived me; but, of course, I was bucklered up in my own thoughts, and could see nothing else.

"You are ill," said Sara, "or you are worried; or 'tis I have done something. If I have, I don't mind; that is to say, I am very sorry, of course, and I will never do it again. But if you think you will get rid of me by looking glum, you are sadly mistaken. I shan't go. If you won't have me for a friend, I shall come for a servant,

and fight it out with Lizzie. Lizzie, will you have me for 'a neebor?' Ah, I'm learning Scotch."

"Eh, that's no Scotch!" cried Lizzie; "ye dinna ken what it is. I'm, maybe, no that good at learning folk now, for I have to speak English mysel'."

"And Italian, Lizzie!" cried Sara, clapping her hands, and forgetting all about my "glum" face.

Lizzie's elbows and ankles fell almost immediately, and the most extraordinary blush rose on the girl's face. "Eh, but it's funny to hear *twa* speaking't," cried Lizzie, evading the subject eagerly. The truth is, she had got overmuch involved in the delightful excitement of the new language, and in consequence of the ludicrous fascination of the dictionary, by means of which Domenico and she conducted their conversations, had come to like the society of that worthy. When I found him escorting my child-maid and the baby out-of-doors, I thought it was time to

remonstrate on the subject; and my remonstrance had woke a certain womanly consciousness in the awkward-sensitive girlish bosom of Lizzie. She was overwhelmed with shame.

Fortunately, the mention of the "twa" diverted Sara's thoughts. She had never ceased to be interested in Mr. Luigi, and I saw a world of questions in her eye immediately. I hurried her downstairs, not feeling able, really, for random talk; and troubled, more than I could express, to think how disappointed Harry would be when he came home full of one subject, expecting to talk it over with me, and found me occupied entertaining a stranger, — a stranger, too, who had something to do with it, who was our rival, and plotting against us, all unaware of who we were.

However, as it happened, one of the first things Sara's eye lighted upon when we entered the room, was that old drawing of poor papa's, which lay on the table. She

was the quickest creature imaginable. She had it in her hand before I knew what she was about. Her exclamation made me start and tremble as if I had been found out in something. Here was another witness giving evidence freely, without any wish or contrivance of mine.

"Why, here is the Park!" cried Sara, "actually the very house! Where, in all the world, did you get it? Have you been there? Do you know them? Why, I thought you were quite strangers to Chester! I never knew anything so odd. Who did it? It is frightfully bad, to be sure, but a staring likeness. Dear Mrs. Langham, where did you get this?"

"I got it out of an old book," said I, with a guilty faltering which I could not quite conceal. "What Park is it? where is it? I do not know the place."

But I am sure if ever anybody looked guilty and the possessor of an uncomfortable secret, it was me at that moment. I turned

away from Sara, putting away that envelope with the certificates which Harry (how careless!) had also left on the table. I am sure she must have felt there was something odd in my voice.

"What Park? why, *the* Park, to be sure. Everybody in Chester knows the Park; and here is an inscription, I declare!" she cried, running with it to the window. "Oh, look here; do look here! It must have been some old lover of godmamma Sarah's. I never saw anything so funny in my life. 'Sarah as I saw her last.' Oh, Mrs. Langham! do come and look at this comical, delightful thing! Isn't it famous? She's as old — as old as any one's grandmother. Who could it be? who could it possibly be?"

"Did you say your godmother?" said I. This was another novel aggravation. Of course I had heard Sara speak of her godmothers; but, somehow, I had not identified them with the ladies who were expected to make her their heir.

But Sara was too much excited and delighted, and full of glee and ridicule, to answer me. She kept dancing about and clapping her hands over the drawing; always returning to it, and indulging in criticisms as free and as depreciatory as Harry's had been. It was getting dark, and I confess I was very glad to sit down a little in the half light, and repose myself as well as I could while she was thus engaged and wanted no attention from me. Just then, however, I heard Harry's foot coming upstairs, and, to my great wonder and almost alarm, somebody else entered with Harry. I could scarcely see him as I rose to receive my husband's companion. Somebody else, however, saw him quicker than I did. In a moment Sara had dropped into the shadow of the curtains, and became perfectly silent. An inconceivable kind of sympathy with her (it could be nothing but mesmerism) somehow cleared up the twilight in a moment, and made me aware who the stranger was.

It was Domenico's master, Mr. Luigi, the Italian gentleman downstairs.

I cannot tell how the first preliminaries were got over. Of all times in the world to make acquaintance with anybody, think of the twilight, just before the candles came in, and when you could scarcely make out even the most familiar face! We got on somehow, however; we *three* — Sara sitting all the time dropt down, and nestling like a bird among the curtains, struck into the most unaccountable silence. I suppose she thought nobody saw her; whereas, on the contrary, Mr. Luigi, looking out of the darkness where he was sitting towards the window, saw the outline of her pretty head against a bit of green-blue sky as distinct as possible; and looked at it too, as I can testify.

When candles came at last (Mrs. Goldsworthy had a lamp; but it smoked, and the chimney broke, and all sorts of things happened to it), after the first dazzled moment

we all looked at each other. Then Sara became clearly visible, and was forced out of her corner to let the blind be drawn down. She came forward to the light at once, with just the least bravado in her manner, ashamed of hiding herself. She had still the drawing in her hand.

"Mr. Langham," said Sara, "do you know this wonderful drawing? I never was so amused and amazed in my life. Do you know it's the Park? and my god-mamma Sarah when she was a young lady and a great beauty. To think you should find it accidentally! And it must have been one of her old lovers who did it. Oh, please give it to me, and let me show it her. She would be pleased. She would soon find out whose it was."

Here Mr. Luigi, who had taken up one of those old books of my father's, which Harry in his carelessness had left upon the table, uttered a very brief instantly suppressed exclamation. I wonder what *he* could have

discovered! It was the copy of Racine, which I have before mentioned as among papa's books, on which was written the name of Sarah Mortimer. Sarah Mortimer! Here were we all strangers, or almost strangers, to each other, all apparently startled by the sound and sight of this name. What could the Italian have to do with Sarah Mortimer? she who broke poor papa's heart, and whom we had found out so suddenly to-day?

"This lady?" said Mr. Luigi, holding up the book to me with a slight tremulousness, "Madame will not think me impertinent; does she live?"

"Indeed," said I, with a shiver of agitation, "I cannot tell. I do not know anything about her; her name on that book and the drawing is all we know. I think she is a ghost. Do you too know her name? Sara, tell us, for pity's sake, who is this Sarah Mortimer of the Park?"

Sara stared at the book with still greater

amazement than she had shown at the drawing. "She is my godmamma," said the girl, in a disturbed, amazed tone. "She is Miss Mortimer of the Park. Since you all know her name, you all know that certainly. How is it you know her? why did you not tell me? Is there any mystery? it all seems very strange to me."

"Then it is that lady," exclaimed Mr. Luigi — "it is that lady I did meet in the village."

"No," said Sara, recovering herself in a moment; "you met my other godmamma, her sister. She told me she had met you. May I ask if you found the lady in Manchester? Godmamma was very much interested and anxious to know. Did you find her? have you heard where she is to be found?"

Mr. Luigi looked at the book once more; then closed it down firmly with his hand; then gazed a little anxiously in Sara's face. "Have I found the lady?" he repeated like an echo. "Mademoiselle, I do not know."

Then the Italian, as if with an instinctive motion, laid his other hand over the book, and clasped them both upon it as though to hold something fast. Then to my amazement and to Sara's — but to something more than amazement on Sara's part — something very much like pique and offence —he turned towards Harry and began to talk on indifferent matters. I had noticed a half-weary, half-impatient sigh escape him as he laid his hands over that book; but he showed no other symptom of emotion. The next moment he was talking in very good English, slightly, very slightly, broken with now and then a foreign idiom, something about public affairs. I confess I felt disappointed as well as Sara. He had recognised that name; somehow it was familiar to him; and his enigmatical answer had naturally stimulated our curiosity. He left us behind him staring and wondering, when he suddenly glided from the brink of some revelation to those quiet remarks

upon English politics. Harry, full of his share of the common excitement, did not enter into it with half so much heart as Mr. Luigi. Harry blundered and was awkward, his thoughts being elsewhere. Mr. Luigi was quite undisturbed and at his ease. Sara scarcely spoke again while he remained; she did all but turn her back upon him; she showed her pique quite clearly enough to catch the quick eye of the Italian. Altogether he did not stay very long, thinking us, I daresay, rather an uncomfortable party; and Harry, disappointed as I had expected, not to find me alone, and be able to hold a comfortable consultation, went downstairs with him to smoke a cigar.

"Now they are gone," cried Sara; "now the man in the iron mask has left us. I wonder if that is what one would call a romantic Italian? ah! I'd rather have fat Domenico. Now they're gone, do tell me, once for all, what is godmamma Sarah to you?"

"Nothing in the world that I know of," said I, faltering a little; "we have only that drawing and her name in the old book."

"I know there is something between her and *him*," said Sara, returning, to my great dismay to the other books on the table; "she knows about him, or he knows about her, or something. You know she was a long time abroad. What funny old books! Was it among those you found the drawing? But, stop, here is another Mortimer — Richard A. Mortimer — who is he? Papa has been their agent for centuries, and I have known them all my life, but I never heard of a Richard Mortimer. Do tell me, who was he?"

"Indeed, it is all very odd," cried I, really fluttered out of my self-possession. "I wonder what will come of it? It is very strange and bewildering. Richard Mortimer was my father."

"Then you are a relation!" cried Sara;

"you must be a relation, there are so few Mortimers; and your father must have been her lover. Are you sure, are you quite sure? Why, *your* name must be Mortimer too! and Milly! Mr. Langham calls you Milly — Milly Mortimer! Oh, dear, dear! I never can get to the Park to tell them to-night, and how shall I contain myself till to-morrow? I knew there must be something that made me love you so much at first sight. To be sure, that explains everything. Milly Mortimer! oh, you dear, pretty, good, delightful Mrs. Langham! I am so glad, so happy! They are my godmothers, and so to be sure we are relations too."

Upon which Sara threw her arms round me in a wild, rapid embrace. I was so very much shaken and disturbed with all that had happened, that I could scarcely bear this last. I remember using all my remaining power to convince her that the relationship was by no means certain still,

and that it was not to be communicated to the ladies at the Park without further assurance. Sara, however, only overpowered me with caresses and exclamations. She entirely upset all the remaining strength I had. She kept us from that consultation which Harry and I were both so much longing for. She left us at last in terror lest we should be brought into immediate contact with those unknown relatives. This day of great news, excitement, and perplexity, was, I think, the most exhausted, uncomfortable day I ever met with in all my life.

CHAPTER IX.

"It is the oddest business altogether that I had ever anything to do with," said Harry, next morning; "one cannot tell what step to take first. My own idea, of course, is to call on this old Cresswell and get it all out of him. He evidently is the man who knows."

"Ah, but, Harry, if he is one of those scheming lawyers," said I, "why should he go and betray his clients for people whom he never heard of before? and, besides, it would be impossible to tell him how we got information about it, for you could not speak of the advertisement without ruining poor Mr. Ward."

"Milly, I may be sorry enough for your poor Mr. Ward, but I am more interested a great deal in you and your rights," said Harry; "besides, if everything came true we could make it up to him. I see nothing for it but going to old Cresswell. He will be glad — since he did think of an advertisement — to have such a rod of terror to hold over the heads of his old ladies; at all events we shall know what it is. It might come to nothing after all," said Harry, with a little sigh, "and there is nothing more injurious than to be kept uncertain. Why, to tell the truth, I feel extravagant this morning: I got up with the feeling. I should like to go and ruin myself in accordance with the sentiment of the moment. If it's all true, why should we be economical?—your grandfather's red brick house on one side, and this Park on the other. We're lucky people, Milly. I'll either go and see old Cresswell and have it out with

him, or I'll go and throw away every shilling I have."

"Ah, Harry, give it to me," I said, holding out my hands; "but I don't believe you have any money, so it doesn't matter. Only — just wait a little, please; don't let us do things hastily. Think of thrusting our claims suddenly upon two old ladies who perhaps have enjoyed it all their life. Only think of us two, young and happy, disturbing the lives of two old people who are not so fortunate as we are! Not to-day; let us try to get other proof first. Try if Mr. Pendleton knows anything — write to Haworth again. At least, don't let us be hasty; a day or two cannot matter; and I don't trust this Mr. Cresswell," cried I, with some vehemence. "He cannot be honest, or he would not have done such a thing."

Harry laughed at my earnestness. He said lawyer-villains had gone out of fashion, and that there were no Mr. Gammons now-

a-days. The truth is, we had both been reading novels since we came to Chester, and I am not at all sure that Harry was as sceptical about Mr. Gammon as he professed to be. But, to my consolation, he went out without any definite purpose of beginning his proceedings. "I dare say old Cresswell is an old humbug," said Harry. "I'll see whether there is not some other old fellow about who is up to everybody's genealogy; surely there ought to be some such person about the Cathedral. And I'll write to Pendleton, Milly. To be sure, there is nothing to hurry us. 'Let us take time, that we may be done the sooner.' I'll do nothing desperate to-day."

When he was gone I felt a little sense of relief. I sat long in the same chair, with the table still littered with the breakfast things, neglecting my duties and even baby. He had been brought downstairs before Harry went out, and was now sitting at my feet on the carpet, playing with my work-

basket, which much contented him. I did not observe the havoc that was taking place, but sat still in a tumult of thoughts which I could not describe. I suppose nobody ever did come to a sudden knowledge — or even fancy — that they might be found out heirs of a great estate without feeling fluttered. I was half afraid of the thought, yet it had a strange, vague, bewildering exhilaration in it. Sometimes a trembling shadow would cross my mind of my old spectre; but it had faded again to-day into the agitation of surprised and trembling hopes. One does not always feel the same even about one's own terrors. And, upon the whole, I felt raised into a kind of general elevation, thrust up above myself into another region, capable of being kinder, more liberal and magnanimous than I had ever felt before. I suppose it must have been the same feeling which Harry had when he said he felt extravagant. I could have emptied my purse to a beggar, I believe,—

at least I could have found it in my heart to give him sixpence instead of a penny,—to such an extent had this vague, exhilarating *rich* feeling carried me away.

Lizzie looked a little mysterious when I called her at last. She was bursting with something to tell; and when I addressed some ordinary question to her, her news broke forth suddenly without any introduction. "Eh, the gentleman's awa' again," cried Lizzie, "and he thinks she maun be found or heard tell o' — he thinks there *maun* be word of her. The gentleman's awa' back where he was, to bring something he left, and 'Menico says, as sure's death she maun be found."

"Who must be found?"

"Eh, mem, it's the leddy! They came a' this gate, ower the hills and the seas, to find a leddy. I canna just understand wha she is," said Lizzie, "but she's some freend; and 'Menico's clear she maun be found now,

and he's dancing like to bring down the house for joy."

"But you don't look very joyful, Lizzie; what is the matter?" said I.

Lizzie made a desperate effort to restrain herself, but, failing, burst into violent tears. "Eh, he's written me a letter!" cried the girl, sobbing; and then, with much fumbling, eyes blind with tears, and a face all glowing with shame, the letter came forth from the bosom of Lizzie's dress, and was thrust into my hand.

Alas for my self-congratulations over Lizzie's childish age! Fourteen, after all, it appeared, was no safeguard. But I was as much amused as troubled when I undid Domenico's letter. It was written on odd thin paper, in a very tolerable hand; it was addressed to *the* Elizabeth Bain, and its contents were as follows:

"To the my little good Lessee.

"You be good child; ifthe ladyyours will, I take you to the theatre after to-morrow,

for gratitude. To me you show of bounty, I to you of thanks. There be grand sight at the theatre which will please to you. Show the Signora yours this letter mine, and ask if permission. It will much please to me to make festa for my little good Lessee. There be none word in English for festa, for because the English not know to make it.

"DOMENICO."

"But, Lizzie," cried I, in surprise, "there is nothing in this to cry about. He only means to be kind, poor fellow. There is not a word in all this that sounds like ——"

Love-making, I was about to have said, but paused, partly in respect for the innocence of the girl, and partly ashamed of myself for my instinctive suspicion that flirtation was inevitable when "a foreigner," however fat, was in the case. Lizzy had wiped her eyes and was looking at me wistfully, quite ready to sob again.

"Oh, it's no him," cried Lizzie; "he's a papist, puir man, and he doesna ken ony better. But oh, mem, it's me—me that was weel brought up, and learned the catechism and aye gaed to the kirk; and what will I do? what will I do?"

"For pity's sake, Lizzie, tell me what is the matter?" cried I, really alarmed.

Lizzie burst into tears once more. She wiped her eyes with her apron, with hot and humid hands; then, casting a pathetic glance at me from under that drapery, sobbed forth the dreadful confession, "Oh, mem! though I think burning shame, and ken it's dreadful, I canna help it—I would like to gang!"

This anti-climax was too much for my gravity, and Lizzie looked on with moist, uncomprehending eyes at the burst of laughter which I could not restrain. Poor Lizzie! I have no doubt she thought me very heartless neither to satisfy her guilty desire after such vanities, nor her scruples

of conscience and violent shame at her own weakness. Baby, however, was more sympathetic. Seeing his beloved Lizzie in tears, a fellow-feeling made him scream in concert. *He* had to be consoled, though his nurse went away wistful, trembling lest I should consent, and lest I should not consent. But privately I confess I was very much relieved and not a little ashamed of myself. To think I should have suspected any absurd love-making between these two! I felt ready to go and ask poor Lizzie's pardon. But why should not she go to the theatre and satisfy her mind? Domenico could not be less than twenty years older than herself. On the whole, this little episode quite increased the lightness of my spirits. The day was bright, the spring was every hour becoming more sweet, and as I sat there by myself with my child in the little back-room, noting the sunshine, which did not reach us, fall sweet upon the little walled-in gardens at the back, a sudden project which

had already glanced through my mind, became feasible on the moment. Yes, I should do it. Lizzie and baby, for a breath of country air, should go with me. By actual witness of my own eyes I would identify the Park.

CHAPTER X.

The next day Harry had duties of one sort and another, which would completely occupy his time. He had not found any student of genealogy who could tell him all about the Mortimers of the Park; but he had heard of one, and, between that and his duty, was full engaged both in person and thoughts. A better opportunity could not be. I told him I thought of taking a long walk into the country with Lizzie and baby this beautiful day; and, except a warning not to go too far and weary myself, Harry had nothing to say against my intention. I may say, however, that in the mean time, having consulted with him on the subject,

I had plunged Lizzie's mind into the most dread commotion of terror, delight, and curiosity, by consenting to Domenico's proposal, only adding Mrs. Goldsworthy to the party, to make all right.

And it was true that Mr. Luigi had disappeared again; he was only to be three days gone, Domenico assured us, holding up three of his fingers. "Tree sola, tree only," repeated the fat fellow once more, blocking up the passage as of old; and once more, with that inimitable wheel and elastic step of his, opening the door before any one could approach it. I could not help wondering to myself whether the Italian gentleman was likely to leave Chester before we did; certainly the loss of Domenico would make quite a difference in the house. I had not thought quite so much as I might have been supposed to have done about this Italian gentleman. He too had recognised the name of Sarah Mortimer as having some influence on his fate. He had left

early next morning, as if acting upon the knowledge he had gained, whatever that might be. It was very strange; afterwards, of course, I came to lay everything together, and wonder at myself that I had not seen how things were tending. But at the moment I was full of my own thoughts; they seemed so very much more important to me just then than anything else. I dismissed Mr. Luigi with just half a thought of surprise and curiosity; I dare say Sara Cresswell had thought more of him. And Sara had not come to me through all that long intervening day. Could she have gone to the Park to tell her news? would they acknowledge or pretend to disown us? That was a question far more interesting to me than all the Italians in the world.

The private object of my expedition, however, was one I was truly ashamed to mention to anybody; but, for all that, it had taken a great hold upon myself. I have said I had been reading novels; and

the very last one we had from the library was "Ten Thousand a Year." It struck upon my mind even at the very moment when poor Mr. Ward had told me first. Those dear, good, delightful, fine, superfine Aubreys! to think of all their sufferings, the poor dear superlative people—how dreadful they felt it to have only a *maid* waiting at table! Oh me! and only to think that here might we ourselves be bringing about such another calamity! Of course you may think it was very fantastical. I do confess that the dreadful downfall of having only a *maid* to wait, seemed to me, at first sight, the very most *fine* distress I had ever heard of; but it took a hold upon my mind all the same; I could not help imagining to myself the other side of the picture. It was very pleasant to think of falling heirs to a great estate, and being lifted in a moment from poverty into great wealth; but who were those two pathetic figures turning away

from the closed door of the house which had been their home so long, mournfully settling down in their new straitened quarters, breaking up all the habits of their lives, missing somehow in an unspoken way, that it would be ludicrous to express in words, but was far from ludicrous to feel, all the grander circumstances of their life? Ah! that was quite a different question. I thought I could see them sighing over their contracted rooms, their fallen state — not speaking, falling silent rather, life going out and ebbing away from them. I saw the two pale old lofty faces, the pride, the submission, the deep sense of downfall concealed in their hearts, and I felt myself stopped short in my way. Those ineffable Aubreys, those figures painted on velvet, those dear porcelain creatures, with their exquisite troubles, had an effect upon my imagination, even though I might venture to smile at them sometimes. Superfine people, to be sure, must

have superfine afflictions; and to think of being a Tittlebat Titmouse, and driving out such angels from their paradise into the cold-hearted, unsympathetic world, that cared no more whether they had a six-foot footman and a carriage, than it cared about myself, a subaltern's poor wife, driving out of Chester in an omnibus! So this was the real cause of my journey. I went remorsefully, thinking all the way how Mrs. Aubrey swooned at all emergencies. I wonder, when they heard the dreadful power we had over them, would Miss Sarah and Miss Milly swoon in each other's arms? I could see them going about, stricken silent, afraid to look at each other; and it would be all *our* doing. Remorseful to my very heart, I went to visit their village and ask about them, and see the house if I could. Perhaps some arrangement might be made, after all, to prevent any loss to these poor dear old ladies. I felt as if I could have done anything for them, my heart was so

compunctious and repentant of the power we had to do them harm. I am not sure my great magnanimousness did not have a root in what Harry called *feeling extravagant*, as well as in "Ten Thousand a Year."

We went out a considerable part of the way in the omnibus, and then walked. After a good long walk through a nice country, we saw a pretty common a little way before us: I call it pretty because some parts of it were very unequal and broken, having gorse bushes, with here and there a golden honey-bud among the prickles. To get to the common, we crossed over a very clean, nicely kept piece of road, straight and smooth, leading down to the village from the gates of a great house. The house was too far off to make it out, but I felt my heart beat a little, knowing, from the description I had got, that it could be no other than the Park.

I left Lizzie and her charge seated on the

soft grass of the common, where baby, who had never before known anything so delightful, began to pluck at the crowflowers with his fat hands; and went down into the village to buy them some biscuits. I confess I felt very guilty. Going anywhere all by myself confused me, not being accustomed to it; but I was not an innocent stranger here; I was a spy in my rival's kingdom; I was a Bolingbroke pretending to acknowledge the sway of the existing sovereign: I was going to traffic with his subjects and tamper with them. If the village authorities had found me out, and held a court-martial and hanged me on the spot, I think I should have acknowledged the justice of their decision. I was a spy.

It was a nice village—a nice, well cared-for, tidy, yet not too picturesque or unnatural village; looking as if the richer people about were friendly and sensible, not interfering too much, but keeping up a

due reverence and influence. Some tall bushes of broom were actually bursting into yellow streaks over the garden palings — not wall — of a house standing back a little, which I found out to be the Rectory. It must have been very sheltered and warm, for it was still only April. However, though I was full of curiosity, my mind was not sufficiently disengaged to carry away a clear picture of the village; and when the women looked out from the doors at me with an instinct that a stranger was passing, I felt more guilty than ever. I made my way accordingly to the baker's as fast as I could, and got some great dark-complexioned ponderous buns there, which I felt sure would rouse Lizzie's national sense of superiority to great triumph. Then I made a tremulous excuse of wanting some biscuits besides, and so got a little time to bring forward the questions I had prepared.

"Who is it that lives in the great house

at the other end of the village?" said I hypocritically, pointing with my finger towards the Park.

"Who is it?" said the baker's wife, leaning on her counter with a certain contempt and admiration of my ignorance; "law bless you, ma'm, you don't know this place, seemingly. Them's the Miss Mortimers, the oldest family in Cheshire. They're as well known as the Queen about here."

"I am a stranger," said I hurriedly. "Are they ladies—I mean are they young ladies? were there no sons?"

The baker's wife leaned back upon a sack of flour, and laughed. "Miss Milly's godmoother to half the village," she said; "she's none that young, she's isn't. No, there wasn't no son. I've heard my mother say there was once talk of making Miss Mortimer an ouldest son like, but it couldn't be done. They're cooheiresses, that's what its ca'ed—I've seen it written down myself—cooheiresses of the late Lewis Esquire;

that's the name it goes by; and as they ain't married it's no harm."

"Did they succeed their father, then?" said I.

"And that they did," cried the woman, "and their father's father, and grandfather, and great-grandfather, as far back as I don't know when; they're no mushroom folks, the folks in the Park."

I felt very much puzzled and perplexed; how could my father, then, have anything to do with it? It was very strange.

"But I suppose the lands were entailed, then, or something of that sort. Was there never another heir that claimed? I think you must be wrong," said I, betraying myself in my wonder and haste.

The baker's wife opened her eyes wide and stared; then laughed out rather scornfully—politeness is not the first rule either of life or speech in Cheshire.

"I've lived here in the village all my life," she said; "if I don't know, I'd

like to hear who should. Nay, nay, there never was a dream of another heir; they're surer nor most folks are the Miss Mortimers. There ain't scarce one living belonging to them to get it when they're gone. I tell you what it is, it's a mistake. You're thinking on Eden Hall."

"Oh!" said I, "perhaps! I am a stranger here."

"Sure you're strange," said the baker's wife; "any one in the village could tell that. Ne'er a one asked such questions o' me — nor any questions at all, but the price of bread, and how the crops are to be, except that Frenchman with the moustache. You're not belonging to him, are you? You're English by your speech."

"Oh yes, I'm English," cried I, not without a vague momentary vision of the village court-martial, and being hung up for a spy. "I will take my change, please."

And I took my change, and went away

with quickened steps but changed feelings. I had not the heart to speak to anybody else. I passed old women at their doors, who, no doubt, could have told something about it; but I did not venture to make any more inquiries. I was completely lost in perplexity. The undisputed representatives of a race, the heirs of father, grandfather, and great-grandfather to unknown antiquity — what could be urged against their possession? I was startled into sudden doubt of the whole matter. What if it were all a deception? The very pathway swam and twisted under my eyes. When I reached the common, and threw myself wearily on the grass beside little Harry and his maid, I felt quite a different person from her who had left them there. I gave Lizzie the coarse buns, but I did not listen to the comments which came as I knew they would. I was far too much bewildered and shaken out of my fancies to be amused. After I had rested awhile, I got

up, and, taking them with me, went up, rather faltering, to the gates of the Park. A little lodge, half hidden among evergreen bushes, was at the gate. I went forward, Lizzie following me close, to ask if we might be permitted to look at the house.

But, just as I was going up to the door, I was accosted by a lady who came hurriedly forward by a side-path. She held out her hand to stop us before she came up, and full of fanciful alarm as I was, I stopped, startled, with again the sensation of having been found out. She was middle-sized and stout, with a plump, handsome figure, and sensible, kind face — very sensible, very kind, not brilliant at all; and, I think, with as much perplexed thought and anxiety upon it, as there was on mine.

"Don't go into the lodge with the baby, please," she cried, as soon as she was near; "the little girl has the hooping-cough. It's always best to keep out of the way of

danger. If I can tell you what you want, I shall be very glad. I see you're a stranger; or if you want to see Mrs. Williams, send away the baby, please. Hooping-cough's very catching, and it's hard upon such a young child."

This voice and this speech completely overpowered me. I could not doubt for a moment that this was one of the Miss Mortimers. I was no longer a mere spy; I was an unnatural traitor. I motioned Lizzie with my hand to go away, but stood still speechless myself, the tears rising to my eyes. The lady stood waiting to see what I wanted, but discovering my distress, as some people can, came a little closer to me. "Are you ill? can I help you in anything?" she said, looking very pitifully and kindly into my wet eyes.

"No, thank you. I was going to ask if I might look at the Park; but I must make haste after baby," I cried. I had the impulse to curtsey to her as children

do; for anything I know I did it. The only thing I am certain of is, that as fast as my feet would carry me, I hastened away.

CHAPTER XI.

We were able to get the same omnibus going home, which I was very glad of, for the strange defeat I had received made me feel doubly weary with the walk, which, after all, had not been a very long one. There was only one person in this omnibus, which was not a town omnibus, you know, but one which went between Chester and an important village, seven or eight miles off. He was an elderly man, very well dressed in black, with a white cravat. To tell the plain truth, I took him for a dissenting preacher by his dress; and as he looked very serious and respectable, and was very

polite in helping us to get in, we had some little conversation after a while. When he saw me look at the houses we passed with an appearance of interest, he told me the names of them, or who they belonged to. He was exceedingly polite and deferential, so polite that he called me ma'am, which sounded odd; but I could only suppose he was an old-fashioned person and liked such antiquated ways of expression. I confess a suspicion of his real condition never crossed my mind. But he evidently knew everybody, and after a while my prevailing idea woke up again.

"Do you know," said I, with a little hesitation, "the family at the Park—the Miss Mortimers? I should very much like to hear something about them."

"There's nobody I know better, ma'am," said our companion, with a slight look of surprise; "I've been with — that is, I've known 'em this fifty years."

"Oh, then will you please tell me how

they succeeded?" said I; "how did they come into the estate?"

"How they succeeded?" said the stranger, with a certain slow wonder and amazement; "why, ma'am, in the natural way, after their father as was Squire before them."

Here I could not help thinking to myself that the dissenting clergy must be dreadfully uneducated, if this were one of them.

"But was there never any gap in the succession?" said I; "has it been in a straight line? has there been no break lately — no branch of the family passed over?"

"Bless you, ma'am, you don't know the Mortimers," said our friend; "there's never enough of them to make branches of the family. There was a second cousin the young ladies had a many years ago, but I never heard of no more of them, and he was distant like, and had no more thoughts of succession than I had. If that gen'lman

was alive or had a family, things might be different now."

"How do you mean things might be different now?" cried I.

"The ladies, ma'am, has never married," said the man, who certainly could not be more than a Methodist local preacher at the utmost, "and, in the course of nature, there can't be no natural heir."

This view of the subject, however, was one totally unsatisfactory to me. "Are you sure," said I, "that there never was any other heir spoken of — that there never was any story about the succession — that there was never anybody to dispute it with the Miss Mortimers? I thought I had heard some such story about ——"

"Ah, you're thinking, ma'am, of Eden Hall, just the next property," said he.

"But was there never any claimant to the Park?" asked I, somewhat excited.

"No such thing," said the man in black, "nor couldn't be. Bless you, the family's

well known. There never was so much as a will-case, as I ever heard on; for why, you see, ma'am, there never was such a plenty of children to make quarrels. When there's but two or so, there's little can come of quarrelling. No, no! there never was no strange claimant to our estate."

"To *your* estate, did you say?" cried I in amazement.

"No, ma'am, no—no such presumption. I said *our*, and sure I might; I've been with the ladies this fifty year."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, much dismayed. This was certainly coming to the very head-quarters for information. This was no local preacher after all, but only the Miss Mortimers' major-domo. If there had been any possible excuse for it, I should certainly have got out of the omnibus immediately, so utterly confounded and taken aback did I feel. But as we were still some two miles out of Chester, and we were all tired, and baby cross and sleepy, I had to think better of it.

However, in my consternation I fell into instant silence, and felt really afraid of meeting the man's eye. He sat opposite me, beside Lizzie, very respectful and quiet, and by no means obtruding himself upon my notice. I cannot tell how shocked and affronted and angry I felt with myself. I had, I suppose, like most people of my condition, a sort of horror of men-servants, a sort of resentful humiliation in feeling that I had mistaken one of that class for an ordinary fellow-traveller, a frightened idea of what Harry would think to hear of his wife sitting in an omnibus beside Miss Mortimer's man. Altogether I was sadly discomfited and beaten. The Miss Mortimers had got the better of me at every hand; and I was entirely humiliated and cast down by this last blow of all.

The interval was quite tedious and oppressive till we arrived in Chester. Seeing me look at another house unconsciously as we passed, the man, most kindly and good-

humouredly, I am sure, after my sudden withdrawal from the conversation, mentioned its name. "That is Dee-sands, ma'am, the mayor o' Chester's place. It ain't within sight of the Dee, and there's none of them sands near here, but they do say it's named after a song," said the good-natured cicerone. "Oh!" said I again, shrinking back into my corner. He looked at me rather closely after this, muttering something that sounded like "No offence!" and leaned back also, a little affronted. It did not occur to me that I was only drawing his attention to what I had said before by this sudden reserve. I took care to show no more interest in the wayside villas, and sprang out with a great sense of relief when we reached the end of our journey. Happening to glance back when I had reached our own door, I saw that the omnibus had been delayed by numerous descents from the roof, and was still standing where we

had left it, and that Miss Mortimer's man had put his head out of one of the windows, and was watching where I went to. This circumstance made me enter with great haste and trepidation. Now, above all, I had been found out; and if ever any one felt like a traitor and a spy, it was surely me, stumbling back from that unsuccessful enterprise across the threshold of Mrs. Goldsworthy's house.

The door was opened to us too alertly to be done by anybody but Domenico; and it was Domenico accordingly, in his vast expanse of shirt sleeves. It was quite a comfort to see his beaming, unconscious face. "The time is fine," said Domenico; "it pleases to the signora to make promenade? Ah, bravo! the piccolo signore grow like tree."

This was in reference to baby, who crowed at him and held out his arms, and whom Domenico freely called piccolo and piccolino, at first somewhat to my in-

dignation; but I confess the good fellow's voice and looks, and the way baby stretched out to him, out of poor Lizzie's tired arms, was quite consolatory and refreshing to me. It is easy to get a feeling of home to a place, surely. It was only lodgings, and Domenico was a foreigner, and I had not the ghost of an early association with the little insignificant house; but I cannot tell you what a sense of ease and protection came upon me the very moment I was within the door.

Upstairs on the table lay a letter. We got so few letters that I was surprised, and took it up immediately, and with still greater surprise found it to be from Sara Cresswell, lamenting over not having found me, wondering where I could have gone, and concluding with a solemn invitation to dinner in her father's name. "Papa is so anxious to see Mr. Langham and you," wrote Sara, "and to talk over things. I have been obliged to obey him for once, and not

to go or write out to dear godmamma till he has seen you. If you don't come he will be so dreadfully disappointed ; indeed, I am quite sure if you don't come *he will go to see you.* I can't suppose you will be able to resist such a threat as that. Send me a word, please, directly. I shall be quite wretched till I know."

This revived all my excitement, as may be supposed; there *must* be something in it after all, and surely, instead of Harry going to his office to seek him, it would be much better to meet at his house, and with an evening's leisure too; for Sara had taken care to add that nobody else was to be there. The earnestness of this invitation seemed so entirely contradictory to all that I had heard to-day, that the wildest vague suspicions of mystery began to break upon my mind. To be sure, bakers and butlers were not likely to be in the secret. Mr. Cresswell knew all about it; and here was he seeking us en-

tirely of his own accord! Once more all my dazzled ambitious dreams came back again; I forgot my failure and sense of treachery — I was no traitor — it was only my rights that I had been thinking of; and they were not pathetic possible victims, but triumphant usurpers, who now had possession of the Park.

CHAPTER XII.

I HAD managed to regain my spirits entirely before Harry returned: if anything, indeed, I think this revival of all my fancies, after my disappointment and annoyance, had stimulated me more than before. It was a beautiful April evening, quite warm and summer-like, and there had just been such a sunset, visible out of the front windows, as would have gone far at any time to reconcile me to things in general. I was sitting in the little drawing-room alone, with baby Harry in my lap, much delighted to find that he could stand by my side for half a minute all by himself, and rewarding him with kisses for the exhibition of that

accomplishment. I was tired after my long walk, and felt it delicious rest to lean back in that chair and watch the light gradually fading out of the sky, free to think my own thoughts, yet always with the sweet accompaniment of baby's inarticulate little syllables, and touches of his soft small fingers. I remember that moment like a moment detached out of my life. My heart had rebounded higher out of its despondency. Who could tell what a bright future that might be on the very brink of which we trembled? And I, whom Harry had married so foolishly, it was I who was to bring this wealth to my husband and my child. It was pleasant thinking in that stir of hope, in that calm of evening, sitting listening for Harry's step on the stair. The light grew less and less in the two front windows, and the open door of communication between the two rooms brought in a long line of grey luminous sky from the east into my twilight picture. And I had

so much to tell Harry. Ah, there at last was his foot upon the stair!

He came in, not to the room in which I was, but to the other, and gave a glance round it to see if I was there; then, not seeing me, instead of calling out for "Milly darling," as he always did, Harry threw his cap on the table, and dropped heavily into a chair, with a long sigh — a strange sigh, half relieved, half impatient — the sigh of something on his mind. I can see the half-open door, the long gleam of the eastern window, the scarcely visible figure dropped into that chair — I can see them all as clearly as at that moment. I stumbled up unawares, gathered baby into my arms I cannot tell how, and was at his side in a moment. My own voice sounded foreign to my ears as I cried out, "Harry, what is it? tell me!" Nothing else would come from my lips.

He rose too — the attitude of rest was not possible at such a time; he came and

held the child and me close to him, making me lean on him. "It is nothing more than we expected," he said, "Milly darling. It is only to have a heart—you are a soldier's wife."

I knew without any more words. I stood within his arm, silent, desperate, holding my dear frightened baby tight, too tight. Ah, God help us! In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, as the Bible says, out of the happiest flutter of hope into that cold, desperate, hopeless darkness. I could have fancied I was standing on a battlefield, with the cold, cold wind blowing over us. I made no outcry or appeal; my heart only leaped with a start of agony at the worst, at the last conclusion. We were not within his sheltering arm—he young, and strong, and safe—but looking for him—looking for him on that black, dead battlefield!

I don't think it was the cry of the child, whom he took softly out of my straining arms, but Harry's compassion that roused

me. I cried out sharply, "Don't pity me, Harry; I'll bear it." It was all I could say. I went out of his arm with agitated, hurried step, and shut out that cruel clear sky looking down upon the battlefield I saw. I did not think nor notice that this unseasonable action threw us into perfect darkness. It was a kind of physical relief to me to do something with my hands, to ring some common sound into my ears. At this moment Lizzie came into the room, carrying lights. As I lifted my confused eyes to them, what a ghastly change had passed on this room — all so cold, dark, miserable; the furniture thrust about out of its place; the fireplace dark, and Harry standing there, with the child in his arms and his cap thrown on the table, as if this very moment he was going away. He was in uniform too, and the light caught in the glitter of his sword. Was there to be no interval? My head swam round. My heart seemed to stop beating. The misery

of imagination drove me half frantic — as if the present real misery had not been enough.

After a while we sat together once more as usual, he trying to bring me to talk about it and receive it like a common event. "It is what we have looked forward to for months," said Harry; "it should not be strange to you now. Think how you looked for it, Milly darling, long ago."

"Yes," said I. Was it likely I could talk? I only rocked myself backward and forward in my chair.

"You said God would give you strength when the hour came: the hour has come, Milly. You are a soldier's wife!" he said.

"Yes, yes!" and then I burst into an attempt to tell him what I had been doing — if I must talk let me talk of something else than this — and broke down, and fell, God help me! to crying and sobbing like a child; which was how the good Lord gave

me the power of bearing what He had sent. I got better after that; I heard and listened to it all, every detail, when they would have to go, where they would sail from,—everything. And then I grew to see by degrees that Harry, but for me, was not sorry to be sent to the war; that his eye was brightening, his head raised erect. Oh me! he was a soldier; and I—I was only a foolish creature that could not follow him or be with him, that could not come between him and those bullets, that could only stay at home and pray.

But when he came and stroked my hair down with his hand, and soothed me like a child, and bent over me with such compassion in his face—sorry for me, full of pity in his affectionate tender heart for the poor girl he was leaving behind—that was more than I could bear. With a dreadful pang I thought it was his widow he saw, all lonely and desolate, with no one to comfort her; and I, his wife, thrust him

away, and defied that dreadful killing thought. No! *I* might leap at the worst, because I could not help my hurrying, blind imagination; but he should not, no one else should — I was resolute of that. So we talked of all the things that were needful for his preparation; and he spoke of expense and economy, and I laughed and scorned his talk. Economy! expense! Perhaps I did not know, could not think where it was to come from; but where careless money can get everything, do you think careful love would fall far short? I took courage to laugh at his words.

And then I told him all my day's trials, and that invitation for the next day, which, even after what had happened, we must still accept. We did not have baby downstairs again that night—I dared not—courage will go so far, but not further. I went upstairs to put him into his little bed, and was glad, God help me! to be out of Harry's sight for half an hour. But still I was not free;

Lizzie was about me, gliding here and there with her inquisitive sharp eyes—sharp eyes all the sharper for tears, praying and threatening me with her looks. Nobody would believe in my courage. They thought I should break down and die. Oh me! if one could die when one pleased, one might sometimes make short work of it; God does not give us that coward's refuge. When I was all alone in my own room, I took an old regimental sash of Harry's and bound it round me tight. I cannot tell why I did it; I think it was in my fancy somehow to bind up my heart, that it should neither yield nor fail.

PART V.

THE LADIES AT THE HALL

(*Continued*)

CHAPTER I.

THE LADIES AT THE HALL.

Some weeks of quietness passed over us after these dreadful half-revelations which really disclosed nothing. I will not attempt to give you any explanation of my state of mind; I don't think I could if I tried. I had ceased to think of insanity in respect to my sister Sarah; she was not insane — no such thing. That scrap of conversation I had overheard in her dressing-room overturned all my delusions. Some real thing, some real person, had power to drive her half mad with anxiety and fear. What she could be anxious about — what she could be afraid of — she who had lived in the deadest peace at home

for nearly five-and-twenty years — was to me an inscrutable mystery. But that this Italian stranger was no stranger — that his name was given him after the name of my father — that love, supposed by Carson to be love in the heart, and admitted by Sarah to be love for the estate, had suggested that name — were facts not to be doubted. I need not say anything about the long trains of agitated and confused thinking into which these discoveries betrayed me. They ended in nothing — they could not end in anything. But for a kind of determination I had, to keep up steadfastly till some light came, and see the end of it, I don't doubt they would have made me ill. But I kept well in spite of them. Either our bodies are not so sensitive as they are said to be, or I am a very stupid person, which I wouldn't deny if I was taxed with it; for certainly many things that worry other people don't trouble me very much. However, let the reason be what it might, I

kept up. I could not take any comfort, as Sarah did, in knowing this young man had gone away. I can't tell how she could have blinded herself, poor soul. *I* knew he would come back. She did not seem to think so; yet surely she knew all about it far better than I did. What a strange blank, unexplainable mystery it was! Judging by appearances, the young man could not be much more than born when she returned home. Yet *she knew him.* Incomprehensible, wild, mad idea, of which, even after all I had heard, my reason denied the possibility! *She knew him!* and what or who, except herself, could explain it?

The only conclusion I could come to in all my pondering was one that had glanced into my mind before, that my father had married abroad and had a son, whom Sarah had somehow stormed or threatened him into disowning. But then my father was — I grieve to say it, but one

must tell the truth—a man who considered his own will and pleasure much more than anything else in the world; and I don't think it would have broken his heart to have turned us out of our heiress-honours, especially when we grew old and did not marry. And to have left a male heir behind him! It was a very unlikely story, to be sure; but certainly Sarah and he were never friends after their return. They avoided each other, though they lived under the same roof. They treated each other with a kind of ceremonious politeness, more like mutual dislike than love. Dear, dear, to think in a quiet English family how such a dark secret could rise and grow! I set to hunting up all my father's letters, not those he had written to me at home, for he never wrote except when he was obliged, but his own letters which he had left behind him. I could find nothing there that threw the slightest light upon the mystery. And then, if he was my father's son, what could

the young Italian mean by seeking after this fabulous lady? What had the Countess *Sermoneta* to do with it? On the whole, anybody will see that I ended my investigations and reasonings just where I began them. I knew nothing about it—I could discover nothing. I had only to wait for the storm that was returning — that must return. And if — oh, dear, to think of such a thing! — if it was the miserable wealth we had, that prompted Sarah to set her face against this stranger— if it were to keep possession of the estate from him who was its lawful owner, then, thank Heaven! we were coheiresses. She thought she could do as she pleased with the Park, and I dare say, in right and lawful things, I might have yielded to her; but I hope Millicent Mortimer was never the woman to keep what did not belong to her. If he had a title to the estate—Heaven knows how he could—I gave up trying to imagine; — but if he had, without either re-

sistance or struggle he should have my share.

I really could not tell how much time had passed from that day when Sara Cresswell left us. It was near the end of April, so I suppose it must have been about two months after, when the accident I am going to tell happened. One afternoon when I was in the shrubbery I saw a young lady coming up towards the gate, a young creature, pretty and fair-complexioned, not tall, but very compact and orderly in her looks, with the air of being a handy, cheerful little woman, and good for most things she required to do. That was how she struck me, at all events. I dare say many people would have said she was just a very pretty girl, evidently sobered down by an early marriage, for she had an odd nursemaid by her side, carrying a beautiful baby. This stranger caught her attention very much as I watched her through the tall evergreen bushes. There was no mystery about *her*, certainly. I took a liking for her all of a

sudden. Somehow it flashed into my mind that if I had ever been as young and as happy I might have been just such a young woman myself. I don't mean so pretty, but the same kind of creature. She was not rich, it was clear, for the nursemaid was not much more than a child, an odd, awkward-looking girl; and though the young mother herself was sufficiently well dressed, her things had that indescribable home-made look which one always recognises. She was a little heated with walking, and had some very grave wrinkles of care, thoughtfulness, and even anxiety, upon her pretty smooth forehead. I saw her aiming straight at the door of the lodge, and hastened out to warn her off. She was certainly a stranger, and could never know that the hooping-cough was in the house. She took my warning very oddly, looked at me with great curiosity and with tears — I am sure I saw them coming into her eyes — and then, with some half-explanation about

wishing to see the Park, hurried away after her lovely little boy. I don't know how long I stood, like a fool, looking after them, with a great desire to call her back and ask her in to see the house. Very likely she had come out from Chester to give her baby a country walk. Pretty young soul! I had no more doubt she was a good little wife than that she was a pretty creature, and very young to be that child's mother. I dare say she was tired and would have been much the better for a rest. But while I stood thinking of it, of course she was gone far out of the range of my voice. As for running after her, that was out of the question at my age; and perhaps, after all, it was as well not to bring that lovely baby near the lodge. Mary might have rushed out, and the mischief might have been done in a moment. As for hooping-cough itself, when children have good constitutions, I can't say it is a thing I am very timid about; but it goes very hard with

infants, and one could never excuse one's-self for putting such a child in peril. So I went back to the house, though rather slowly. I can't tell how it was, I am sure, — but I felt just as if I had missed a visit from a friend whom it would have been a great comfort to see.

I might have forgotten this little incident altogether, but for something that happened afterwards. Ellis had to go into Chester that day — indeed, he had just left a few minutes before my pretty young stranger came up. When Ellis came back he took an opportunity of speaking privately to me —indeed, he asked me to step aside into the hall for a minute. How he had found out that there was any uneasiness in my mind, or that any doubt about our right to the estate had ever occurred to me, I cannot tell; there are few things more wonderful than the kind of instinct by which servants divine the storms that may be only brooding about a house. Ellis looked very grave

and important; but as he always does so, I was noways alarmed.

"There was a young lady, ma'am," said Ellis, "rode in the omnibus along with me this afternoon; well, not perhaps what you might call a *real* lady neither; leastways I don't know — her looks was all in her favour; but ladies, as you know, ma'am, don't go riding in an omnibus with bits of nursegirls and babies. But I don't say she was one of your common sort."

"Why, it must have been that pretty young creature," said I.

"Well, ma'am," said Ellis, actually with a little shamefacedness, "if you ask me my opinion, she was a pooty young creature, and so was the baby. But it ain't what she looked, Miss Milly; it's what she said. She asked as anxious as could be after the family at the Park."

"Did she know anything of us?" said I, quite delighted. "I wonder who she is; she quite took my heart."

"Not if you'd have heard her speak, ma'am," said Ellis. "She asked, kind of curious like, how you came to succeed to the estate, and whether there wasn't no gap in the line, and if none o' the family were ever passed over, and a deal of such questions. I told her it was Eden Hall she was thinking on, but she wasn't satisfied. She said wasn't there another claimant to the estate, and was I quite sure you was the right people and hadn't passed over nobody? But the strangest thing of all was, as soon as I let out by accident I belonged to the Park, it was all over in a twinkling. Afore you could know where you was, from asking her questions and looking as anxious as you please, and her little veil up over her bonnet, and her face turned to you like a child—in a moment, ma'am, it was dead shut up and draw back, and the veil down and the face as if it didn't see the place you was. I said to myself 'There's summut in this,' as soon as ever

I seed the way she took me belonging to the Park; and, to be sure, all the way not another word. Seeing things like that, I made bold to take a look after her when she went out; and if you might chance to have any curiosity, Miss Milly, here's a note of the address."

"But what should I have any curiosity about?" said I, agitated and surprised, taking the paper from him eagerly enough, yet quite at a loss to account for any interest I could have in his adventure. Ah! had it happened six months ago, how I should have laughed at Ellis! but it could not have happened six months ago. Ellis himself would have taken no notice whatever of such questions then.

"Ma'am," said Ellis, "the quality has their own ways; if *I* don't know that, who should? I dare to say it ain't nothink to you; but it's curious to have parties asking about the Park, as if we was a family as had romances; and being a pooty young

creature, you see, Miss Milly, I thought it might be possible as you'd like to know."

"Very well, thank you, Ellis. I know you're always careful about the interests of the family," said I.

"I've been at the Park fifty year," said Ellis, with his best butler's bow. I gave him a nod, and went away to the library a great deal more disturbed than I would let him perceive, but I don't undertake to say that he didn't see it all the same. Here was just the very fuel to set my smouldering impatience into a blaze. A sudden impulse of doing something seized upon me like a kind of inspiration. Here was a new actor in the strange bewildering drama. Who was she? Could she be Luigi's wife coming to aid him? As the thought struck me I trembled with impatience, standing at the window where it was too dark to read that address. I must wait for the morning, but certainly here was light out of darkness. However foolish it might be, I could

bear it no longer. Here was a clue to guide my steps, and, whether right or wrong, to-morrow I should plunge into the mystery. The idea took possession of me beyond all power of resistance. I walked about the library in the dark, quite excited and tremulous. The wind had risen, and the night was rather stormy, but I could not go into the comfort and light of that great drawing-room where Sarah sat knitting. To-morrow, perhaps, I should know the secret of her death in life.

CHAPTER II.

I GOT very little rest that night, and was up almost by break of day the next morning. In the height of my excitement and anxiety, I felt more comfort in my mind than I had done for a long time. Sitting waiting is dreadful work, but I felt myself again when there appeared anything to do. I would not allow myself to suppose that it could end in nothing. Such inquiries could not possibly be made without a motive. I was so restless that I scarcely could remain quietly at home for the hour or two after breakfast which, out of regard for appearances, I was obliged to sacrifice; but for the same reason I made up my

mind not to take the carriage, but to walk to the point where the omnibus passed, and take my chance of finding a seat in it as other people did. I went out accordingly about eleven o'clock, and left a message for Sarah that I was going to make some calls, and that she was not to wait dinner for me, as *I* should probably lunch somewhere at a friend's house. I saw Ellis look out after me from the hall window, with a kind of solemn grin on his face. Ellis was not to be deceived; he knew where I was going as well as I did myself.

As I had intended, I got into the omnibus when it passed, to the great amazement and dismay of both guard and driver, who knew me well enough. I thought to myself, after I was in it, that it was perhaps rather a foolish thing to do. If any talk got abroad about our family, and if the strangers, male and female, kept making strange inquiries, and I was seen driving—no, that is not the word—*riding* in an

omnibus, what would people think but that some extraordinary downfall had happened at the Park? There were only some countrywomen in the coach, who stared at me a little, but were too busy with their own affairs to mind my presence much. Fortunately there was no one there from our own village. It was a very long drive to Chester, going in the omnibus; and being unaccustomed to it, and never on the outlook for jolts, I felt it a good deal, I confess, besides being just the least thing in the world in a false position. Not that I minded being seen in the omnibus, but because the guard knew me, and was troublesomely respectful, and directed the observation of the other passengers towards me. Great people, when they pretend to travel *incognito*, must find it a great bore, I should fancy. Of course somebody always betrays them, and it must be a great deal easier to bear what you can't help bearing when there is no mystery about it, than

when every blockhead thinks himself in your secret, and bound to keep up the joke with you.

At last we came to the street, and I got down. It was near the railway station, and so all sorts of traffic poured past the place; shabby hackney cabs, omnibuses from the Chester hotels, vans of goods, all the miscellaneous stuff that pours into railway stations. The houses were a little back from the road, to be sure, with little "front gardens," as the people call them. I walked past three or four times before I had screwed myself up to the point of going in. The thing that dissipated all my feelings of embarrassment in a moment, and brought me back to the eagerness and excitement with which I set out from home, was the sudden appearance of Mr. Luigi's servant, the large, fat, good-humoured Italian, whom I have before mentioned, at the door of one of the houses. The sight of him flushed me at once into deter-

mination. I turned immediately to the house where he stood, and of course it was *the* house, the number which Ellis had written down on his paper; there could be no doubt on the subject now.

"I wish to see your mistress," said I, going up to the man, too breathless and eager to waste any words.

He looked at me with good-humoured scrutiny, repeating "Meestress" with a puzzled tone; at last a kind of gay, half-flattered confusion came over his good-humoured face, he put his hand on his heart, made a deprecatory, remonstrating bow, and burst into some laughing mixture of Italian and English, equally unintelligible. The fellow actually supposed I meant his sweetheart, or pretended to suppose so. I became very angry. He did not look impertinent either; but you may fancy how one would feel, to be supposed capable of such a piece of levity at such a time. And a person of my con-

dition, too! Happily, at this moment the nurse-girl whom I had seen with my pretty young stranger suddenly made her appearance with the baby in her arms. I appealed to her, and though she stared and made answer in words not much more intelligible to me than her fellow-servant's, she showed me upstairs. She was going out with the beautiful baby, but one way and another I was so worried and uncomfortable, and felt so strongly the existence of those plots against us which I was now going to clear up, that I took no notice of the child. I said nothing at all but that I wanted to see her mistress, and walked into the little drawing-room without thinking that I might be going into the young stranger's presence, possibly into the presence of both husband and wife. However, the moment I had entered I saw her; there she was. In my heat and annoyance I went up to her instantly. "Young lady," said I, "you were in the neighbourhood of my

house yesterday; you were in our village; I myself saw you approaching the Park. You put some very strange questions to my servant. You must know how harassed and disturbed I have been by inquiries which I don't know the meaning of. What is it all about? What claim has your husband upon the Mortimers? Who is he? What does he want with us?"

I said this without pausing to take breath, for my encounter with the servant, I confess, had irritated me. Now, when I had said my say and come to myself, I looked at her and felt a little shocked. She was certainly changed since yesterday; but before I had time even to make a mental comment on this change, I was entirely confounded by the entrance of a new and unsuspected actor on the scene; *her husband!* evidently her husband; but as unlike Mr. Luigi as one handsome young man could be unlike another,—a bright, open-faced, unmistakable Englishman, a young

soldier. The sight of him struck me aghast. What new complication was this?

"If there's going to be any fighting, that's *my* trade," said the new-comer. "We'll change places, Milly darling. Madam, my wife has a great many things to occupy her just now; let me answer for her, if that is possible. I think I know what she has been about."

Saying which, he wheeled the one easy chair in the room towards me, and invited me to sit down. I sat down with the feeling of having somehow deceived myself strangely and made a huge mistake. I could not make it out. Mr. Luigi's servant was below, and this was certainly the young woman whom I had arrested on her way to the Park, and who had asked questions of Ellis in the omnibus. But who was this handsome young soldier? What had he to do with it? A cold tremble came over me that it was what the newspapers call a mistaken identity, and that

somehow I had stumbled in, after the rudest and most unauthorised fashion, into the privacy of two innocent young creatures who knew nothing about the Park.

"Pardon me if I am wrong," I said with a gasp; "I fear I must be wrong, only let me ask one question. Did you speak to a man in the omnibus yesterday about the Mortimers of the Park? or was it not you? I am sure I shall never forgive myself if I have made such a foolish mistake."

"But it is no mistake," said the young wife, who had remained in the room, standing very near the half-open door into the tiny apartment behind. Poor young soul! she was certainly changed in those twenty-four hours. I could scarcely resist an impulse that came upon me, to go up and take her in my arms, and ask the dear young creature what it was that ailed her. Depend upon it, whatever she might have asked about the Mortimers, that face meant

no harm. I looked at her so closely, I was so much attracted by her, that I scarcely noticed, till she repeated it, what she said.

"It is no mistake," she said, growing firmer; "I did ask questions. I am sure you are Miss Mortimer — we will tell you how it was. Harry, you will tell Miss Mortimer all about it. I am a little — a little stupid to-day. I'll go and fetch the books if you will tell Miss Mortimer how it was."

She went away quite simply and quietly. He stood looking after her with a compassionate, tender look, that went to my heart. He did not speak for a moment, and then he said, with a sigh, something that had nothing to do with my mystery. "We got marching orders for the Crimea yesterday," said the dear simple-hearted young fellow, with the tears coming into his honest eyes. "It is very hard upon my poor Milly;" and he broke off with another sigh. If the two had come to me

together the next moment, and disclosed a plan to turn us out of our estate or pull the house down over our heads, I could have hugged them in my arms all the same. God bless the dear children! whatever they had to tell, there was but one thing in their thoughts, and that was the parting that was coming. If I had been the hardest heart in the world, that spontaneous confidence must have melted me. As it was, I could hardly help crying over them in their anguish and happiness. People are happy that have such anguishes. I could hardly help exclaiming out aloud, "I'll take care of her!" and yet, dear, dear! to think of human short-sightedness! Had not I come all this way to find them out?

She came back again a minute after, with some old books in her arms. "Have you told Miss Mortimer, Harry?" she asked, pausing with a little surprise to hear no conversation going on between us, and to

see him leaning against the mantel-shelf just as she had left him, with his hand over his eyes. Then she gave him a quick, affectionate, indignant glance — I might say petulant — and came up in her energetic way to the table, where she put down the books. "*I* will tell you, Miss Mortimer," said the brave little woman. "We do not know very much ourselves, but perhaps when you hear our story you can make it plain better than we can. We found it out only by chance."

"My dear," said I, "do not call me Miss Mortimer; my eldest sister is Miss Mortimer. I am called Miss Milly; Millicent Mortimer is my name."

Here the young man broke in suddenly. "*Her* name was Millicent Mortimer too," he cried. "Milly! — that is her name — I beg your pardon, Miss Mortimer; I think there is no name in the world equal to it. She's Milly, named so at her father's desire. Tell me, is she nearly related to you?"

I was so astonished I rose up to my feet and stared at them both. To be sure, I had heard him call her Milly; but my thoughts had been so entirely drawn astray by Mr. Luigi, that I never thought of anything else. I stood perfectly thunderstruck, staring at them. "What are you telling me?" I cried. Really my mind was not in a condition to take in anything that might be said to me. She put the old books towards me one by one. I opened them, not knowing what I did. "Sarah Mortimer, the Park, 1810." Heaven bless us! Sarah's hand, no doubt about it; but who in the world was *she?*

"Child, take pity on me!" I cried; "with one thing and another I am driven out of my wits. Tell me, for heaven's sake, who was your father? Are you *that* Luigi's sister? Who are you? Where did you come from? God help us! I don't know what to think, or where to turn. Your father, who was he? What do you

know about him? Were *you* born in Italy too? What *is* the truth of this wild, dreadful mystery? Sarah may know about it perhaps, but I know nothing, nothing! If you would not have me go out of my senses, child, tell me who you are, and who your father was."

They both gazed at me astonished. "She is Millicent Mortimer," said her young husband, "the child of Richard Mortimer and Maria Connor; she was born in Ireland. Milly! Milly! the old lady is going to faint."

For I sank dead down in my chair, as was natural. I put my hands over my face. I fell a-crying and sobbing in that wonderful, blessed relief. If my worst suspicions had come true, I could have stood up and faced it. But my strength went from me in this delicious, unspeakable comfort. Richard Mortimer's children! The heirs we were looking for! Oh dear! to think I could ever be so distrustful of the

good Lord! This was what all the mystery had come to! I sat crying like a fool in my chair, the two looking on at me, thinking me crazy most likely — most likely wondering, in their innocent grieved hearts, at the old woman crying for nothing. How could they tell what a mountain-load of trouble they had taken off my head?

"My dear," cried I when I could control myself enough, "if you are Richard Mortimer's daughter you're the nearest relation we have. You were to have been advertised for before now — we've been seeking you, or trying to seek you, everywhere. I knew there must be something made my heart warm to you so. My dear, we're the last of the old race; there's nobody but Richard Mortimer's children to carry on the name. God help us! I am a silly old woman. I had taken dreadful fears into my head. Why didn't you come and say it plain out, and turn all my anxiety and troubles into joy? Ah Milly, dear Milly

Mortimer!—I could think you were my own child somehow—come and let me kiss you. I am not so weak as this usually, but I'm quite overcome to-day. Come here, child, and let me look at you. It's pleasant to think there's a young Mortimer in the world again."

I was so much engaged with my own feelings, that I did not notice much how the young people were taking it. When I did come to myself a little, they were standing rather irresolute, that pretty young Milly Mortimer looking at me in a kind of longing, reluctant way, either as if she could not take me at my word, or had something on her mind. As for her husband, he was looking at me too, but with a full eager look, which I understood in a moment; his lip trembling and swelling out a little, his eyes full, his whole face telling its story. When he caught my eye he turned his look upon her, and then back to me again. Do you think I did not understand him? He said, "You will take

care of my Milly?" clearer than he could have said it in a thousand words; and if my eyes were slow to answer him, you may be sure it was no fault of will or heart. Seeing she was shy to come to me, and recovering myself, I went to the new Milly and kissed her. I can't tell what a pleasure I took in looking at her. She belonged to me — she was of our very own blood, come from the same old forefathers. I thought nothing strange that I loved her in a moment. It was not love at first sight, it was *natural affection*. That makes a vast difference. Even Sara Cresswell was not like a child of our own family. To think of another Milly Mortimer, pretty, and happy, and young! such a Milly as I might have been perhaps, but never was. I felt very happy in this child of my family. It was half as good as having a child of one's own.

Then they showed me some other books with poor Richard Mortimer's name in them, and his drawing of the Park, and

Sarah getting on her horse. Poor fellow! but I rather fear he could not have been any great things of a man. I felt quite easy and light at my heart; nothing seemed to frighten me. And the two young people even, in the little excitement, forgot their own trouble, which was a comfort to me.

"But all this time, my dear," said I, at length, "you have said nothing about your brother. How did he get to be Italian,—and what did he mean by asking about that lady — and why not come at once to the Park and say out who he was?"

"My brother?" said the young wife, faltering; and gave a wondering look at me, and then turned round, with a habit she seemed to have, to consult her husband with her eyes; "my brother? I am afraid you have not understood. Harry is ——"

"I know what Harry is," cried I; "don't tell me about *him*. I mean your brother — your brother. Why, dear, dear child, don't you understand? I met his man at

the door of this very house — Mr. Luigi, you know, as they call him; of course he must belong to you."

"Indeed," said the new Milly, with very grave, concerned looks, "I never spoke to him but once in my life; we don't know anything about him. I never had any brother; there were none but me."

I don't think I said anything at all in answer. I said nothing, so far as I know, for a long time after. I sat stupefied, feeling my burden all the heavier because I had deluded myself into laying it off a little. Oh me! we had found the heirs that Sarah had thought so much about; but the cloud had not dissolved in this pleasant sunshine. Out of my extraordinary sense of relief, I fell into darker despondency than ever. He was not Milly Mortimer's brother, nor anybody belonging to her. Who could he be?

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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